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Colorado Birds

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly



Hybrid Gulls

West Slope Cuckoos

CBRC Review List Changes



Colorado Field Ornithologists
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The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly Vol. 46 No. 3 July 2012

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A White-throated Swift exits a nest crevice, Garden of the Gods, El Paso County, 24 April 2012. Photo by Bill Maynard

2012 Convention and CFO History

Jim Beatty and Nathan Pieplow

Trinidad 2012 Convention

The annual convention in Trinidad was a rousing success, with good birds and good times had by all. The arrival trips were greeted with a Thursday evening barbecue dinner hosted by the Tourism Board of the City of Trinidad in a scenic setting at Trinidad Lake State Park. The 160 CFO members in attendance, plus our hosts for this unprecedented welcoming event, enjoyed meeting old and new friends alike. It was a great start for a busy weekend of birding. Our total registrants numbered 195.

The field trips headed in every direction from our convention hotel, including to northern New Mexico, the lakes of Otero County, and all four corners of Las Animas County. We were graciously welcomed onto private ranches including Vermejo Park in northern New Mexico, the Louden Ranch on the Mesa De Maya, The Nature Conservancy's Bar N I and Beatty Canyon Ranches, and Rancho Largo. And, of course, many enjoyed the close looks at a wide variety of birds feeding in Beverly Jensen's backyard in La Veta. The total spe-



Birders head out in search of American Three-toed Woodpeckers at the Vermejo Park Ranch in New Mexico during the 2012 CFO Convention. Photo by Christian Nunes

cies count was 206, with many folks getting good looks at Hepatic Tanagers at several locations.

Nathan Pieplow and his fiancée Molly Malone emceed the ID Challenge on Friday night, and the fiercely contested match was not determined until the final round of questions. Equally entertaining and interesting were the presentations at the paper session on Saturday afternoon.



Grady Grissom from Rancho Largo shares ranching insights with CFO Convention 2012 participants. Photo by Tom Wilberding

It was obvious that the authors had worked hard on both their research and presentations.

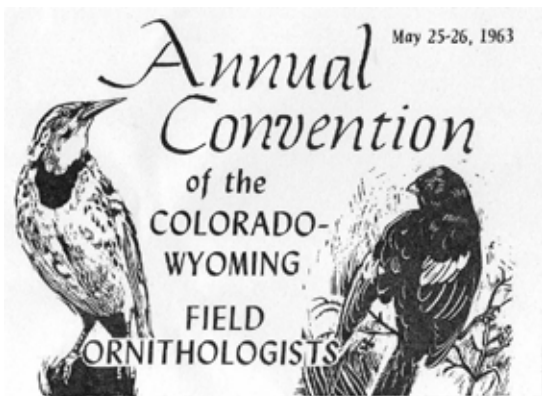
The banquet and its accompanying social hour were held at the A. R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art in Victorian downtown Trinidad. It was fitting that the museum had on display paintings and photographs of many of the ranches we had visited. The Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and Las Animas helped coordinate this event and the entire convention.

After dinner and a short business meeting, CFO presented awards to Rebecca Campbell for hosting many birders to see “her” Pine Warbler and to Lynn Willcockson for his long service to CFO and other Colorado birding organizations. The Ron Ryder award went to Brian Linkhart, an associate professor of biology at Colorado College, for his 30 years of research into the enigmatic and elusive Flammulated Owl, which is easier to hear than to see. The Flammulated Owl was also the subject of Brian’s keynote address. Jim Beatty thanked everyone for a great event, and announced that the board was considering Durango as the location of our next convention in 2013.

CFO History

A few months ago, an out-of-state researcher asked a very simple question: when was Colorado Field Ornithologists founded?

Nobody seemed to be able to answer this question. The board had lists of past presidents and past conventions, but the lists seemed to



Program cover from the first CFO convention, Denver, 1963

contradict one another: Thompson Marsh was listed as CFO's first president beginning in 1965, but the conventions started earlier – either in 1963 or in 1961, depending on the source. Which was the real start date?

The search for the answer prompted a productive conversation and collaboration between numerous interested parties, including Warren Finch, Hugh Kingery,

Bob Spencer, and Lynn Willcockson. Kris Haglund at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science was instrumental in unearthing old meeting minutes of the Colorado Bird Club, forerunner of the Denver Field Ornithologists. These minutes, together with several historical articles published earlier in this journal's history, especially Camille Cummings' "History of the CFO" (1980), clarified the picture.

In the early 1960s there was no statewide birding organization, nor any Audubon chapters in Colorado, but there were five local bird clubs — in Boulder, Colorado Springs, Denver, Fort Collins, and Longmont. Denver's organization would change its name in 1964 to Denver Field Ornithologists, but at the time it was known as the Colorado Bird Club.

As Cummings (1980) put it, "Before 1963 certain born agitators began ruffling the peace of these clubs by clamoring for an annual state convention." These "born agitators" were the likes of Thompson Marsh, Lois Webster, Harold Holt, and a recent transplant from Iowa, Lynn Willcockson, who wondered why his new home didn't have a strong state birding organization like his old home had. This group persuaded the Colorado Bird Club to begin organizing a statewide convention, to bring members of the local clubs together.

In 1962, Mary Louise Rosegay, then president of the Colorado Bird Club, sent a letter to bird clubs, ornithology professors, and other potentially interested people in the state, proposing "a regular annual meeting of the various ornithological societies, students and teachers of ornithology, conservation and game management agencies throughout Colorado and Wyoming." The first such meeting was

held 25–26 May 1963, hosted by the Colorado Bird Club under its new president Harold Holt, in the Phipps Auditorium at the Denver Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature and Science). The meeting was advertised as the “Annual Convention of the Colorado-Wyoming Field Ornithologists” (see opposite page).

Much like conventions today, the meeting program included field trips, a paper session, and a banquet. Registration cost \$1.50 to cover correspondence, a printed program, guards for Phipps Auditorium, and the expenses of the banquet speaker, Dr. Alfred A. Bailey, director of the museum, who showed movies of Colorado wildlife that he had taken in the field.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Lois Webster, the convention chair, the entire affair was a huge success. The club meeting minutes from 28 May 1963 describe the convention as “a wonderful experience” and note that over 100 people attended, seeing 128 species during the weekend field trips, and leaving the club with about a \$30 deficit.

With the first statewide convention a great success, the “born agitators” pushed for formal organization of a statewide club. In 1964, at the second annual convention in Fort Collins, a committee was formed to write a constitution and choose a slate of officers. As a result of the committee’s work, at the third annual convention in Colorado Springs, on 16 May 1965, the Colorado Field Ornithologists was officially born, with Thompson Marsh as its first president and Lois Webster as its Secretary/Treasurer.

This, then, explains the contradictory dates in the history: CFO conventions began before there was officially an organization by that name. Our meeting in Trinidad this spring was our 50th annual convention – but CFO’s 50th birthday isn’t until 16 May 2015!

LITERATURE CITED

Cummings, C. 1980. The history of the C.F.O. *C.F.O. Journal* 14(3): 58-61.

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14 April 2012

City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Office
Boulder, CO

Nathan Pieplow

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 11:06 A.M. by President Jim Beatty. Officers present were President Jim Beatty, Vice President Bill Kaempfer, and Treasurer Maggie Boswell. Directors Lisa Edwards, Doug Faulkner, Ted Floyd, Brenda Linfield, Christian Nunes, Nathan Pieplow, and Joe Roller were present. COBirds moderator Todd Deininger was present for the first part of the meeting. Secretary Larry Modesitt and director Bob Righter sent their regrets.

Secretary's Report—Jim Beatty

Minutes of the 28 January 2012 board meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report—Maggie Boswell

Maggie presented a balance sheet comparison of CFO assets as of 31 March 2012. She stressed that this quarter's report is seasonally inflated, since it includes most convention income from registrations but few convention expenses.

Maggie presented the 2012 budget for approval, with few changes from last year. The budget was approved.

Convention Planning—Jim Beatty

Registration and Hotel: 193 people have registered for the convention, about 20 more than last year. It is on pace to be the largest convention ever. The blocked rooms in the Holiday Inn are all gone. Online registration, PayPal, and a good location may explain the continued upward trend.

Thursday Night Barbecue: For many people, this will be the first event, even before registering at the

hotel, so maps in registration packets may not be an option for getting people there. There is a limit of 130 people, and we have reached it, so people are no longer able to sign up when registering. We will need to have a list of people who are signed up. We should send an email to COBirds and put an item on the website with maps to the barbecue and other convention locations.

Audiovisual: Jim understands from Kim Schultz that we can get equipment from the hotel and take it to the Mitchell museum for the banquet. Jim will take the lead on this. The paper sessions and ID challenge events will require microphone, projector, and audio capability.

Promotion: Ted will send an email to COBirds with tips for having a good convention.

Field Trips: Bill Kaempfer. A number of trips are full, but openings remain on each day. Leaders are still needed, particularly for arrival trips. We discussed using participant feedback from 2011 to create a list of tips for leaders this year. Brenda will let

trip leaders know who is on their trips in advance in case they want to contact their participants.

Banquet: The Tourism Board has invited ranch owners and other community members to the banquet. We don't know how many will come. We are also concerned about making sure people can find the banquet, since it is at a different location than the hotel.

Team ID Challenge and Paper Session: Nathan Pieplow reported that the Team ID Challenge was nearly ready to go, with prizes sponsored by Nikon once again, thanks to Mike Freiberg. Six presentations are on tap for the paper session.

Exhibitors: Larry Modesitt sent a written report. There are only three exhibitors so far. There is room for more.

T-shirts: The shirts have been ordered by Bob Righter.

Breeding Bird Atlas Events: Lynn Wickersham will be putting together various programs in conjunction with the final year of the Breeding Bird Atlas. Signup for the BBA field trips is very good so far. Jim is still working on finding a location for the kickoff meeting.

Breakfasts: Maggie discussed the pickup and delivery of breakfasts and lunches. The hotel restaurant may open early, but as it has no buffet and only makes food to order, restaurant breakfasts may take significantly longer than in past years.

Evaluations: Bill proposed creating an online survey for people to fill out after the convention. Brenda will look into creating this. There was some discussion of what to include on the survey.

Awards—Joe Roller

The board discussed presentation of various awards to be announced at the convention.

CFO Website—Brenda Linfield

The old cfo-link.org website is now gone, and people who visit that site will be redirected to cfobirds.org. The online quiz has been moved to the new site. We may pay an extra \$2.50 a month for downloadable reports of web traffic.

Bewick's Wren—Christian Nunes

The song of a rare bird just outside the office drew the board members outside. The wren was a county bird for many, including various other Boulder County birders who arrived in time to see it.

COBirds—Todd Deininger

Todd discussed the amount of moderation and monitoring that he does as COBirds administrator, and reported that the list is running smoothly.

We discussed the merits of pre-emptive messages discouraging discussion of controversial topics. It was generally agreed that pre-emption is not necessary. The CFO Facebook page can provide a forum for some discussions ill suited to COBirds.

International Field Trip—Bill Kaempfer

A CFO member has offered to lead a field trip for CFO to Panama in 2013. In a lengthy discussion of this opportunity, several directors argued in favor of the opportunity. It was pointed out that a trip to Panama is

not directly tied to Colorado field ornithology, but it was also mentioned that CFO in the past has sponsored trips to Texas, California, and North Carolina. However, CFO has never done an international trip. Serious concerns about liability were raised. Several directors were concerned about favoring or appearing to favor individual commercial ecotourism endeavors.

It was moved that CFO sponsor the trip to Panama. The motion failed on a vote of 2 to 7.

Brenda will announce on the website that CFO members who organize ad hoc birding tours are invited to advertise at the convention via brochures on a table in the vendor room.

Bill will look into proposing a CFO policy on ad hoc and international field trips.

Membership—Lisa Edwards

CFO has 470 active members. Lisa mailed out 85 postcards to people whose memberships have recently expired.

Social Media—Christian Nunes

The Facebook site has seen an uptick in activity recently.

Committee Reports

CBRC: Doug Faulkner reports that the CBRC is nearly caught up with 2011 records. Tony Leukering has been forwarding to Doug some documentations, including photographs and descriptions, for some rare birds documented on eBird but not on the CBRC website. The CBRC has not yet decided how to proceed with these documentations, given that they do

not come from the original observer, and that some of them consist of little more than a photograph. Doug is considering sending COBirds regular quarterly updates listing all the occurrences of review species for which the CBRC requests documentation. The CBRC is reviewing the Main Review List and will be publishing updates to that list. Mark Peterson is working on updating the county checklists. The CBRC “database” is currently a spreadsheet that requires manual updating, so making it more user-friendly and accessible is a major priority.

Colorado Birds: Nathan Pieplow reported that the April issue is at the printers.

Publicity: Ted Floyd. Ted outlined a few possible field trips to TNC ranch properties.

Project and Youth Funds: Bill Kaempfer. No applications for youth scholarships this year.

CFO Field Trips: Bill Kaempfer. Convention trips are more or less set with leaders and routes at this time, although last-minute changes are to be expected.

Nominations: Joe Roller. The board discussed possible replacements for Bob Righter, who is retiring from the board.

New Business

Steve Bouricius sent along a 1994 CFO brochure advertising the organization to potential members.

We have had such brochures in past years but we do not have one currently. Brenda agreed to take the lead in creating a new one.

Kris Haglund at DMNS has offered to curate any historical materials that

CFO wishes to archive with them. The board is in favor of the idea but tabled action until the return of Secretary Larry Modesitt.

Bill mentioned that in September 2014, the American Ornithologists' Union and the Cooper Ornithological Society are having their annual meeting in Estes Park. The board will consider ways to coordinate with these organizations.

Lisa discussed publishing CFO donor names in the journal.

Locations for the 2013 convention were discussed.

Our next meeting will be 11 August in Durango. President Beatty adjourned the meeting at 3:12 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Nathan Pieplow

CFO ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES

19 May 2012
A.R. Mitchell Museum
Trinidad, CO

Larry Modesitt, CFO Secretary

President Jim Beatty called the meeting to order at the banquet of the annual convention. He welcomed the 195 birders in attendance and noted that some had traveled from Arizona, California, and Massachusetts. He thanked Pat Patrick and Lou Girodo, representing the Tourism Board, which hosted the Thursday evening barbecue; Kim Schultz of the Trinidad and Las Animas County Chamber of Commerce for coordinating the convention across many exciting locations; Paula Little, executive director of the A.R. Mitchell Museum; and Victoria Luna of the Holiday Inn, which catered the breakfast burritos, the lunches, and the banquet dinner. He thanked the speakers of the paper sessions for their interesting and well-done presentations, the exhibitors for offering exciting products and services, and Nathan Pieplow for the informative and fun Team ID Challenge and for organizing the paper session.

Beatty announced the voluntary "pass the hat" to help CFO fund scientific research projects and the very important youth scholarships. "Pass the hat" donations totaled a record \$980.

Jim also thanked Bill Kaempfer and Tim Crisler of Trinidad for their efforts in organizing and conducting a wonderful array of field

trips. Last but not least, he thanked the landowners and operators who had graciously opened their gates to allow our field trips birding access to their beautiful ranches. In attendance were Willard and Mary Ann Loudon of Mesa De Maya Ranch, Sara Mackert of Vermejo Park Ranch, and Matt Moorhead of The Nature Conservancy, representing the Bar N I and Beatty Canyon Ranches.

President Beatty noted that CFO finances are strong, and membership is stable at around 470 members. Jim introduced the officers and directors. Since all officers will be continuing their current two-year terms, no elections were needed. He thanked Bob Righter for his service, as Bob is retiring from the board. He noted that CFO is looking for a new director with webmaster or legal skills.

Joe Roller presented a Homeowner Appreciation Award to Becky Campbell, who attracted a Pine Warbler to her backyard feeding station in January and hosted 58 birders who tromped through her house (many deciding to stay inside where it was much warmer) to see the warbler. Chuck Hundertmark presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to Lynn Willcockson, who helped found CFO and originated the Colorado Rare Bird Alert and the *Lark Bunting* bulletin for the Denver Field Ornithologists. Christian Nunes presented Brian Linkhart with the Ron Ryder Award, noting his landmark thirty-year study of Flammulated Owls. Dr. Linkhart then captivated the gathering with the keynote address. He described how little was known when he began studying these owls, what has been learned, and the challenges they face now.

President Beatty announced that the Board is considering Durango as the site of the 2013 convention.

Respectfully submitted,
Larry Modesitt, Secretary

Bill Maynard, CBRC Member

Edited by Jim Beatty

I first met Bill Maynard at Chico Basin Ranch during the 2005 CFO convention in La Junta. He met our tour group at the ranch headquarters and expertly guided us around the many “hot spots” in search of migrants. He almost casually pointed out an Ovenbird by the ranch headquarters, a Magnolia Warbler nearby, and then a female Painted Bunting skulking in the wet area by the pond near the headquarters. It was a great start to a great day of birding that delighted our tour group and showcased Bill’s birding skills.

Bill, who describes himself as “terminally single,” first learned about the beauty of birds from his grandmother. As an undergraduate, he studied botany at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, the “cradle of coaches” (not to be confused with the University of Miami, the “U”). After college, teaching biology and biology electives at an all-girls high school allowed him to spend summers on the Virginia portion of Assateague Island National Seashore, where he wore a “Smokey the Bear” hat and led natural history walks on the beach and in the salt marshes. It was on Assateague Island that he was introduced to dive-bombing terns, tons of Clapper Rails, shorebirds, big waders, and little brown jobs he mostly ignored. Since there was a boat available to the staff, he saw his first flock of storm-petrels, but had no clue about tubenose biology.

Later, Bill learned that he could eke out a living as a “bird bum.” He worked on National Park Service research projects in Denali National Park, Kobuk Valley National Park, and Noatak Na-



CBRC member Bill Maynard processing captured birds at the RMBO Banding Station at Chico Basin Ranch, 14 May 2010. Photo by Steve Brown

tional Preserve in Alaska, and then moved on to a three-year biological study in Florida's newly created Big Cypress National Preserve, where ornithologist and author "Dr. Bill" Robertson was the project leader.

Bill discovered that the U.S. Forest Service hired birders for some research projects, and he ended up conducting point counts, nest searches, and spot mapping on the San Joaquin Experimental Range and Sierra National Forest for Dr. Jared Verner, whose research on observer variability resulted in government agencies using point count methodology for bird surveys. At night, Bill hooted for Northern Spotted Owls in California's Klamath National Forest, and fed mouse treats to a few. Later, he was hired by the New Mexico Game and Fish Department to lead a statewide search for "Southwestern" Willow Flycatchers. It was there, stuck in sand on the way to the Gila River, that he learned that all biologists own four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Bill spent a few years surveying for Mountain Plovers and black-tailed prairie dogs on the Department of Defense's Fort Carson Military Reservation and on Pinyon Canyon Maneuver Site. A past president of the American Birding Association asked Bill if he was interested in working for the ABA, and Bill became their Field Programs Manager, planning birding conventions and activities, including recruiting speakers and field trip leaders for events in Texas, Arizona, Maine, Nevada, Michigan, and California. Was it a coincidence that life birds were ticked while he scouted for potential field trips in these states? Later, Bill became the fifth editor of the ABA publication *Winging It*, where prepositions were often left dangling at the end of sentences.

It was in Colorado in the 1980s that Bill was taken under the wing of Richard Bunn, then chair of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC). Richard encouraged Bill to memorize existing field guides and to skip work to bird. It was during this time that Bill attended bird identification workshops at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science taught by the roving taxonomist Dr. Allan Phillips. Bill's bird identification skills improved enough that he was appointed to a term on the CBRC in the 1980s. Now, he is once again serving the CBRC as a voting member.

Chico Basin Ranch is Bill's favorite haunt. When he isn't birding there, he likes to photograph dragonflies and tiger beetles, whose images he sends to David Leatherman for identification. He was asked to be the first quizmaster for the CFO bird quiz, at the time called Mr. Bill's Photo Quiz. In a former life he was fortunate to travel to the "Bird Continent" (South America) 19 times to bird, and it was there he became infatuated with the indescribable magic of the neotropics.

Although not quite South American, Panama is his favorite birding destination. In addition, he botanizes, grows a few orchids, and photographs almost everything wild he encounters.

Bill's greatest wish is that at the conclusion of his second term on the CBRC he will have maintained at least one or two friendships with the birders whose records he scrutinized but did not always accept. Since individual voting records are not released, Bill is safe!

All jokes aside, Bill Maynard's quiet yet impressive birding competence will always be recognized and appreciated in the Colorado birding community.

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

CFO AWARDS

Homeowner Appreciation Award Recipient: Rebecca Campbell

Joe Roller

The Colorado Field Ornithologists appreciates the hospitality of people who open their doors to eager birders. At the 2012 convention in Trinidad, CFO bestowed a Homeowner Appreciation Award on Rebecca "Becky" Campbell of Greenwood Village, Colorado, who welcomed more than fifty birders to her home to show off the bright male Pine Warbler coming to her backyard suet feeder in December 2011. The engraved plaque read: "Colorado Field Ornithologists Homeowner's Appreciation Award proudly presented to Rebecca Campbell. For hosting birders - Pine Warbler, May 19, 2012."

Becky is proud to be a third-generation birder. She was inspired to take up birding by her mother and especially by her grandmother, Almena Gudas, a lifelong enthusiast. One day on the ground below "Nannie's" feeder in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Becky watched a colorful flock of Indigo Buntings and White-throated Sparrows feeding hungrily. She was hooked, and thereafter avidly birded everywhere her husband's career as an Air Force doctor took them, including New Mexico, California, and Italy, before finally settling in Greenwood Village, Colorado.

On 7 December 2011, Becky glanced out the window, and a little yellow bird caught her eye. What was that? Grabbing her binoculars, she followed the warbler-sized visitor into a pine tree. After studying it for almost an hour, she turned to her field guide and confirmed her suspicion. There it was – a bright male Pine Warbler! A life bird!

Wasting no time, Becky got the word out on COBirds, and soon began welcoming birders into her home. The drill was, “Welcome! Please carry your boots right through the living room, traipse out onto the patio, and reboot.” Becky was a gracious hostess, even when impersonating a T.S.A. agent.

Between the 7th and the 28th of December, each of the fifty-eight guests who came to the now-famous patio was rewarded with close views of the Pine Warbler. Imagine having fifty-eight visitors in your home during the holidays! They came from many places along the Front Range and from two other states and Canada. “One of the best parts of the whole adventure was meeting so many eager birders,” Becky said.

Exactly three weeks after the Pine Warbler had arrived, it departed just as suddenly, leaving only sharp photographs and fond memories.

Joe Roller, 965 South Garfield St, Denver, CO 80209, (303) 204-0828, jroller9@gmail.com

Yellow-billed Cuckoos in Western Colorado

Jason Beason

Introduction

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*, Fig. 1) is one of the most imperiled bird species in the western United States, where declines have been noted since the early 20th century (Hughes 1999). Yellow-billed Cuckoos have been extirpated from British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, and reduced to a small fraction of their historical range in California (Hughes 1999). Yellow-billed Cuckoo populations in the eastern United States are also showing declines (Sauer et al. 2005).

Western populations have traditionally been recognized as a separate subspecies, *C. americanus occidentalis*, but research funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concluded that western populations are not distinct enough genetically, behaviorally, or ecologically to merit recognition as a separate subspecies (USFWS 2001). However, the USFWS considers all Yellow-billed Cuckoos west of the continental divide and in the Rio Grande drainage a Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and designated this population as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2001 (USFWS 2001). Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) lists the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo as a species of greatest conservation need (Colorado Division of Wildlife 2006).

It is difficult to locate information regarding the historical distribution of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in western Colorado. In the 1950s and 1960s, Yellow-billed Cuckoos were found annually in Palisade along the Colorado River east of Grand Junction



Fig. 1. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Old Hotchkiss Water Treatment Plant, Delta County, 13 Aug 2011. Photo by Jackson Trappett

(Righter et al. 2004). Cuckoos were regularly detected as recently as the mid-1980s along the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers near Delta (Rich Leivad, pers. comm.). However, during the first Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas (1987-1994), only three cuckoos were recorded on the western slope (Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Partnership 1998). One of the three atlas records confirmed cuckoos breeding on the Yampa River near Hayden, Routt County, in 1988. In 1998, a focused survey for Yellow-billed Cuckoos in western Colorado funded by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resulted in only one pair being discovered, along the Colorado River near Clifton, Mesa County (Coen Dexter, unpublished report). This pair was observed carrying nesting material, representing the only breeding confirmation since the first Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas in 1988 and the only western Colorado cuckoo breeding confirmation before Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) surveys were initiated in 2008.

In western Colorado, Yellow-billed Cuckoos have historically occupied extensive Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) and narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) riparian forests (Righter et al. 2004). During surveys in 2008 and 2011 in western Colorado, cuckoos were located in riparian areas with Fremont and narrowleaf cottonwood-dominated overstory and a dense understory containing both native and exotic shrub species. In California, where the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo has been well studied, research has shown that cuckoos require forested stands at least 10 hectares (24.7 acres) in size (Halterman 1991). Telemetry research in Arizona indicated an average home range of 39 hectares (96.3 acres) for 28 adult cuckoos (Halterman 2009).

Confirming the presence of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the western U.S. presents several challenges. Yellow-billed Cuckoos do not vocalize frequently to announce territory or to attract mates in the manner of typical riparian bird species; therefore, point-count surveys are not an effective method for determining presence. Current survey methods targeting cuckoos rely on call playback; however, a response rate of only 32% has been observed using this methodology (Halterman 2009). Additionally, the erratic breeding cycle of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo does not correspond with that of other songbirds, and surveys that take place when the majority of riparian bird species are most detectable have ended when cuckoos arrive at breeding sites. A large percentage of the prime riparian habitat in western Colorado is privately owned, and obtaining access requires permission from private landowners, which can be difficult to obtain. At the moment, current and accurate Geographic Information System (GIS) data does not exist for riparian habitat in western Colorado,

making it very difficult to identify where the most extensive riparian habitat occurs.

RMBO surveys targeting the Yellow-billed Cuckoos have revealed that the established focused survey methodology can be effective for locating the species. The 2008 and 2011 survey detections and the 2000 through 2011 incidental detections confirm that cuckoos occupy western Colorado, but at a low density.

Methods

Site Selection

For the 2008 through 2011 field seasons, RMBO consulted with USFWS personnel to select survey sites and contacted biologists and land managers familiar with the area of Colorado that falls within the range of the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo (the West Slope plus the Rio Grande drainage) to locate the most extensive riparian forests in the region. Google Earth™ was also used to identify and measure sections of riparian habitat in the region. Survey locations were distributed throughout western Colorado at elevations consistent with those where cuckoos have been detected in the past decade (between 4,500 and 7,900 feet).

Protocol

All surveys used playback of Yellow-billed Cuckoo calls following a protocol established by Halterman (1991) in an effort to lure cuckoos closer to the observer so that they could be seen and/or to encourage a vocal response. Surveys in 2008 and 2009 were conducted roughly three times a summer. In these years, survey timing and broadcast point locations were not standardized.

Beginning in 2010, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) developed by the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo Working Group (Matt Johnson, unpublished document) was strictly adhered to for all surveys. Per the SOP, broadcast point count survey locations were established in or near appropriate habitat (within 15 meters of the habitat edge) and spaced 100 meters apart. Playback equipment projected the calls at least 100 meters without distortion. Most points were arranged in a linear fashion, following the course of riparian corridors less than 200 meters wide, but there were some sites where riparian habitat was more than 200 meters wide, in which case two points were established 100 meters apart along an axis perpendicular to the riparian corridor. Unsuitable habitat (e.g., a monoculture of tamarisk or extensive areas without trees) was avoided when selecting survey sites if the unsuitable habitat was at least 300 meters in extent.

Broadcast point counts were conducted between 15 June and 15

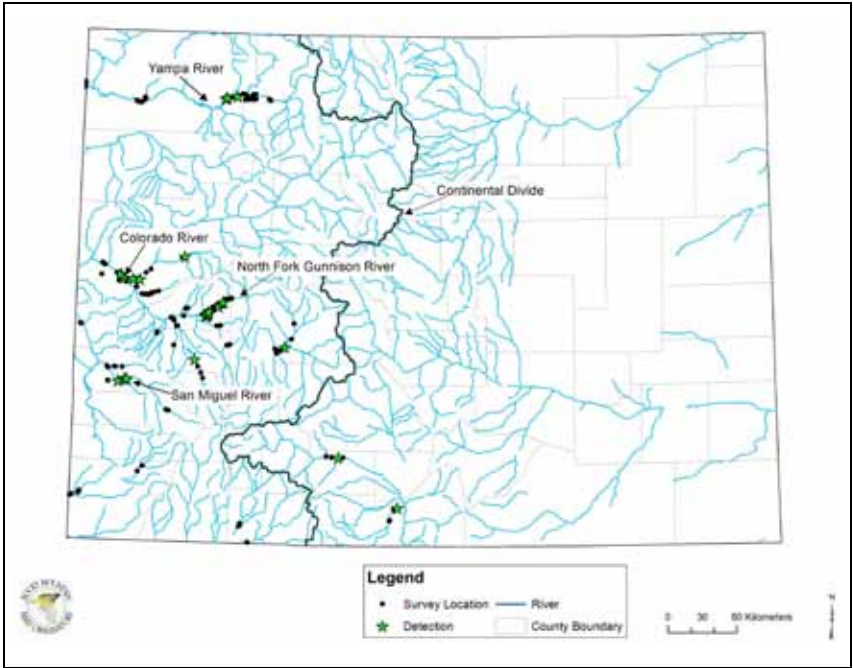


Fig. 2. All Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo survey locations and survey detections, 2008 through 2011, and all incidental detections, 2000 through 2011.

August, a time period chosen to minimize detections of migrating cuckoos. All survey sites selected after 2009 were surveyed four times each year during time periods specified in the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo SOP (mid-June to late June, early July to mid-July, mid-July to late July, and early August to mid-August) . All surveys were conducted with a minimum of 12 days and a maximum of 20 days between visits. If cuckoos were detected at a point, surveyors moved at least 984 feet (300 meters) before conducting another count in order to minimize disturbance to potentially nesting cuckoos. Surveys were initiated one half hour before sunrise and concluded by noon and an optional evening survey period (5:30 P.M. to sunset) was used at some sites.

Each survey began with a one-minute silent period to listen for spontaneously calling cuckoos. If no cuckoos were heard during the one-minute period, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo “kowlp” call of approximately six seconds in duration was broadcast once, followed by one minute of silence to listen for a response. If no detections occurred, this playback-listen sequence was repeated five times or until a cuck-

oo responded. A minimum of seven minutes was spent at each point during a survey. The cuckoo call was broadcast using a FoxPro™ wildlife caller (NX3 Model) or using a small mp3 player with portable battery-powered speakers.

During the first visit to each broadcast point count survey location, we recorded UTM coordinates using a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit. The same locations were later re-surveyed throughout the same season. New survey locations were chosen at the beginning of each year in an effort to survey new sites each year. During the first visit to each broadcast site, we estimated percent canopy cover and species composition of the canopy (>5 meters high) and percent cover of understory and species composition of understory (<5 meters high) before conducting the survey.

Results

In total, 739 broadcast point count locations were surveyed and 2,031 broadcast point counts were conducted across all four years of the project. Yellow-billed Cuckoos were recorded at a total of 10 of the 739 points during surveys. In addition, incidental detections of Yellow-billed Cuckoos occurred at eight locations, some of which were also survey locations. Table 1 lists all detections of Yellow-billed Cuckoos in western Colorado between 15 June and 15 August, 2008 through 2011. Fig. 2 shows all survey locations, detections recorded during RMBO surveys, and incidental detections since 2000.

Discussion

The 2008-2011 RMBO Yellow-billed Cuckoo surveys confirm that the species is rare and difficult to locate in western Colorado. However, it is also important to note that this inventory has not adequately surveyed all western Colorado riparian habitat. A very extensive, costly, and well-organized project would be necessary to thoroughly survey all available habitat that exists within the range of the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Colorado. We are unable to say whether or not there have been declines in the cuckoo population in western Colorado because the historical population size is unknown. Additionally, the current population is unknown because of the incomplete survey effort 2008 through 2011.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos are considered to be a low-elevation riparian species (Johnsgard 1986). However, in Colorado, cuckoos have been located in the San Luis Valley at 7,900 feet of elevation and near Gunnison at 7,700 feet of elevation during the breeding season. These are the highest elevations occupied by potentially breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos throughout their range (Matt Johnson, pers.

Table 1. Yellow-billed Cuckoo detection locations in western Colorado 2008 through 2011

Location	Detection type	Year	County
Grand Junction Bureau of Reclamation Property	Survey	2011	Mesa
Hotchkiss Nicholoff Residence	Incidental	2008	Delta
Hotchkiss Robinsong Residence	Survey	2008 & 2011	Delta
Hotchkiss Robinsong Residence	Incidental	2009-2010	Delta
Nucla Zimmerman Property	Survey	2008	Montrose
New Hotchkiss Water Treatment Plant	Survey	2008	Delta
New Hotchkiss Water Treatment Plant	Incidental	2010	Delta
Old Hotchkiss USFWS Fish Hatchery	Survey	2008	Delta
Old Hotchkiss Water Treatment Plant	Survey	2008 & 2011	Delta
Old Hotchkiss Water Treatment Plant	Incidental	2009-2010	Delta
Paonia Black Bridge	Survey	2008	Delta
Paonia Larmer Residence	Incidental	2008	Delta
Pikes Stockade/McIntire Springs - BLM Property	Incidental	2008-2011	Conejos
Rio Grande County Private Ranch	Incidental	2008 & 2011	Rio Grande
River Ridge - Yampa River	Survey	2008	Moffat
The Paonia Grange	Survey	2008	Delta
Uncompahgre River Private Residence near Montrose	Incidental	2009 & 2011	Montrose
Wyman Museum – Yampa River	Survey	2008	Moffat

comm.). Another unexpected behavior we have noted since 2008 has been the presence of Yellow-billed Cuckoos in forested residential areas over one mile from riparian corridors during the breeding season, at the Larmer residence in Paonia and the Nicholoff residence in Hotchkiss. Although these individuals most likely represent birds foraging away from their nest sites, these observations suggest broader habitat use patterns than previously observed for the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

The riparian habitat along the North Fork River near Hotchkiss is the only location where breeding has been confirmed during surveys in western Colorado. In this drainage we have recorded Russian-olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) as the dominant understory shrub. Given the current interest in eradication of invasive non-native plants from the landscape, it is wise for land managers in western Colorado to consider this information when large-scale invasive plant removal projects are initiated. Unless habitat cleared of Russian-olive is quickly replanted with native vegetation, this process is likely to be harmful to Yellow-billed Cuckoos and other riparian birds because of the loss of habitat. This is especially true if large stands of Russian-olive are removed in a short time period. A safe option would be the incre-

mental removal of Russian-olive and immediate transplanting and nurturing of native species. Research needs to be conducted to determine the best way for land managers to control Russian-olive while at the same time considering bird species occupying areas where restoration takes place in western Colorado.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The 63rd Report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee

Doug Faulkner

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

Introduction

This 63rd report of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC or Committee) presents the results of deliberations of the CBRC involving 60 reports submitted by 28 observers and documenting 45 occurrences of 28 species (or recognizable forms) from the period November 2009 to November 2011. Per CBRC bylaws, all accepted records received a final 7-0 or 6-1 vote to accept. Each report that was not accepted received five or fewer votes to accept.

Highlights of this report include a third state record for Black-chinned Sparrow, the first installment of records from an influx of Varied Thrushes in fall 2011, and the first confirmed record of nesting by Scarlet Tanager in Colorado. With publication of this report, the state list remains at 493 species.

Committee members voting on these reports were John Drummond, Doug Faulkner, Peter Gent, Bill Maynard, Bill Schmoker, Larry Semo, David Silverman, and Glenn Walbek.

Committee Functions

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

Report Format

The organization and style of this report follow those of Leukering and Semo (2003), with some alterations. If present, the numbers in parentheses following a species' name represent the total number of accepted records for Colorado, followed by the number of accepted records during the most recent full 10-year time period (2002-2011). The latter number is of importance, as it is one of the criteria for a species' continuance on or removal from the statewide Main Review List (Semo et al. 2002).

The records in this report are arranged taxonomically following



Orange variant Scarlet Tanager, North Cheyenne Canyon, El Paso, 8 Aug 2011. Photo by Bill Maynard



Yellow-throated Warbler, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo, 13 Sep 2011. Photo by Bill Maynard



Black-chinned Sparrow, Colorado National Monument, Mesa, 20 May 2011. Photo by Bill Schmoker



Sedge Wren, Chico Basin Ranch, Pueblo, 30 Sep 2011. Photo by Bill Maynard

the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Checklist of North American Birds (AOU 1998) through the 52nd Supplement (Chesser et al. 2011). Each record presents as much of the following information as we have available: number of birds, age, sex, locality, county, and date or date span. In parentheses, we present the initials of the contributing observer(s), the official record number, and the vote tally in the first round and, if relevant, the second and third rounds (with the number of "accept" votes on the left side of the dash).

The initials of the finder(s) of the bird(s) are underlined, if known, and are presented first if that person (or people) contributed documentation; additional contributors' initials follow in alphabetical order by last name. If the finder(s) is (are) known with certainty, but did not submit documentation, those initials are underlined and presented last. Observers submitting a photograph or video capture have a dagger (†) following their initials; initials of those who submitted video are indicated by a lower-case, italicized "v" (v); and those who submitted audio spectrograms or recordings are indicated by a lower-case, italicized "s" (s). Thus, the parenthetical expression "(JD v, RA †, TL, JV, CW; 2001-36; 4-3, 6-1)" means: JD found the bird(s) and submitted documentation (including video) and, as the finder, is first in the list of those who submitted details, with initials underlined; RA, though alphabetically first of the five submitting observers, was not the finder, so is listed second; RA submitted, at least, photographic documentation; the record number assigned to the occurrence was 2001-36; and in the two rounds of voting, the first-round vote was four "accept" and three "do not accept" votes, while the second-round vote was 6-1 in favor of accepting the report. The decision on most reports is completed in the first round.

In this report, county names are italicized in keeping with the style established for the "News from the Field" column in this journal. We have attempted to provide the full date span for individual records, with the seasonal reports in *North American Birds* and this journal being the primary sources of those dates. The Committee has not dealt with the question of full date spans as compared to submitted date spans when documentations do not provide such. The CBRC encourages observers to document the first and final dates on which a rare species was seen, as that provides historical evidence of the true extent of its stay.

For this report, abbreviations are used for Chico Basin Ranch (CBR), Reservoir (Res.), and State Wildlife Area (SWA).

RECORDS ACCEPTED

Mexican Duck – *Anas platyrhyn-*

chus diazi. A male of this Mallard subspecies was thoroughly described

at Boulder Res., *Boulder*, 12 May 2011 (SM, TF; 2011-47; 6-1). The documenting observers commented that the tertial pattern (paler and grayer than expected) and thickness of the anterior white speculum wing stripe (wider than expected) were of concern for the bird's being a pure Mexican Duck. The dissenting Committee member noted the observers' identification concern in his vote to not accept. Conversely, another member commented that genetic testing is not a requirement of the CBRC and that this individual was phenotypically a Mexican Duck. The CBRC has used the phenotype standard to accept records of other similarly challenging species, such as Glaucous-winged Gull (*L. glaucescens*). One of the observers of the *Boulder* duck photographed a male at the Firestone gravel pits, *Weld*, on the same date of 12 May 2011 (SM†; 2011-48; 7-0). This individual's plumage did not raise the same concerns as that of the *Boulder* bird.

The taxonomic status of Mexican Duck has been somewhat controversial. The American Ornithologists' Union felt that hybridization with Mallard was frequent enough to consider Mexican Duck merely as a subspecies of Mallard (AOU 1998). However, some experts still consider Mexican Duck to be a full species, with specimen records confirmed from Colorado and Nebraska (Young 2005). Note that the entire population of Mexican Ducks was estimated at 55,000 in 2000, with a per annum average increase of 2.5% per year from 1960-2000 (Perez-Arteaga et al. 2002), which might partly explain the

sudden appearance of this taxon upon the Colorado scene.

Neotropic Cormorant – *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (22/9). An adult was documented for Timnath Res., *Larimer*, 15 August 2011 (TF; 2011-109; 7-0).

Red Phalarope – *Phalaropus fulicarius*. An adult in transitional plumage was photographed at Empire Res., *Morgan*, 7 August 2011 (RG†; 2011-106; 7-0). A juvenile phalarope was found at Antero Res., *Park*, 20 September 2011 (BM†; 2011-123; 7-0) while the observer was viewing a juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger!

Mew Gull – *Larus canus*. An adult was at Valmont Res., *Boulder*, 4-6 February 2011 (TF; 2011-30; 7-0).

Long-tailed Jaeger – *Stercorarius longicaudus* (20/12). The CBRC reviewed and accepted documentations of three individuals found during fall 2011. The first was an adult at Cherry Creek Res., *Arapahoe*, 10-11 September 2011 (JD†, BM†, CT; 2011-115; 7-0). A juvenile visited Antero Res., *Park*, on 20 September 2011 (BM†, MP; 2011-122; 7-0). The third record was represented by a long-staying juvenile at Pueblo Res., *Pueblo*, 13-24 October 2011 (BKP†, BM†; 2011-139; 7-0). The bird at Pueblo Res. was particularly unusual in that it was about a month later than expected. Peak occurrence of this species along the coasts of Oregon and Washington, and inland in those states, is mid-August to mid-September (Marshall et al. 2003, Wahl et al. 2005). This bird represents Colorado's latest date for Long-tailed Jaeger, and only the fourth October record.

Black-billed Cuckoo – *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus* (26/10). Two juveniles were found in separate locations in Washington in mid-September 2011. The first was in the woods below Prewitt Res., 11 September (SM; 2011-117; 7-0), and the second at the Last Chance Rest Stop, 16 September (DF†; 2011-119; 6-1).

Lesser Nighthawk – *Chordeiles acutipennis* (26/11). Documentation of a male observed 11 August 2011 provided the fourth record for the Nucla, Montrose, area, at what is becoming a traditional location for finding this species: the sewage lagoons one mile west of town (CD; 2011-108; 7-0).

Black Phoebe – *Sayornis nigricans*. One visited private property near Lamar, Prowers, 10-11 April 2011 (JS†; 2011-26; 7-0).

Sedge Wren – *Cistothorus platensis* (20/5). One was photographed in the sedge meadow below the Upper Twin Pond dam at CBR, Pueblo, 30 September 2011 (BM†; 2011-126; 7-0).

Wood Thrush – *Hylocichla mustelina* (35/18). An immature was found on the El Paso side of CBR the morning of 21 September 2011 near the banding station, where it was eventually captured and banded that same afternoon (BM†, SB†; 2011-124; 7-0).

Varied Thrush – *Ixoreus naevius*. This species invaded the state during the fall and winter of 2011-12. This report includes accepted records for four individuals, and the CBRC will soon be reviewing documentations for another three individuals. A photographed female at Two Buttes Res., 16 October 2011, represented a rare Baca record (BKP†, DK; 2011-144;

7-0). An adult female was found deceased in Colorado Springs, El Paso, 7 November 2011 (BM†, JH; 2011-157; 7-0). A long-staying adult male apparently feasting on apples in a residential yard in Aurora, Arapahoe, was documented for the lone date of 21 November 2011 (SS, BSB; 2011-169; 7-0). Another adult male was found in a hedgerow at Duck Creek SWA, Logan, 27 November 2011 (KD; 2011-171; 7-0).

Sprague's Pipit – *Anthus spragueii* (16/11). Single individuals were documented on typical dates for fall migrants at traditional locations in Yuma: The Nature Conservancy's Fox Ranch, 7 October 2011 (BM†; 2011-135; 7-0) and the Republican SWA, 15 October 2011 (SM, MP; 2011-141; 7-0).

Tennessee Warbler – *Oreothlypis peregrina*. A fall migrant was observed along the Animas River Trail in Durango, La Plata, 16-18 September 2011 (SA; 2011-120; 7-0). Though regular in small numbers east of the Rocky Mountains, this species is rare west of the Front Range (Righter et al. 2004).

Blackburnian Warbler – *Setophaga fusca*. An adult male was photographed at Prewitt Res., Washington, 4 September 2011 (JD†, 2011-113; 7-0).

Yellow-throated Warbler – *Setophaga dominica*. One was photographed at the CBR headquarters, Pueblo, 12-13 September 2011 (JD†, BM†; 2011-118; 7-0).

Prairie Warbler – *Setophaga discolor* (32/11). An immature male was captured at a migratory bird banding

station near Fountain, *El Paso*, 20 August 2011 (DE, 2011-110; 6-1).

Canada Warbler – *Cardellina canadensis* (34/11). A female, probably an immature, was found at the Last Chance Rest Stop, *Washington*, 5 September 2011 (SM†, GW; 2011-114; 7-0). Another, either an adult female or an immature male, was photographed at Prewitt Res., *Washington*, 23 September 2011 (PG†; 2011-125; 7-0).

Black-chinned Sparrow – *Spizella atrogularis* (3/3). An adult male apparently set up territory along the Devil's Kitchen Trail in Colorado National Monument, *Mesa*, where it was documented for 13 April – 22 May 2011 (JD†, PG†, BKa, BM†, RO†, BKP†, NP s, BSk†, LF; 2011-27; 7-0). The male was observed interacting with a second sparrow, probably a female, on 20 May 2011. The CBRC would welcome additional documentation supporting a nesting attempt or an extension of the date range for these individuals.

Le Conte's Sparrow – *Ammodramus leconteii* (12/3). One resided in a sedge meadow below the Upper Twin Pond dam at CBR, *Pueblo*, 17 September – 5 October 2011 (BM†, JD†; 2011-121; 7-0).

Scarlet Tanager – *Piranga olivacea*. An orange-variant male was documented for lower North Cheyenne Canyon, *El Paso*, 8-9 August 2011 (BM†, MW; 2011-107; 7-0), where it was observed feeding a juvenile tanager. The juvenile tanager had two wingbars and was the presumed hybrid offspring of this male and a female Western Tanager. Hybridiza-

tion between Scarlet and Western Tanagers has been recorded a number of times (McCarthy 2006). Scarlet Tanager had not previously been confirmed breeding in the state, although the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II website (<http://bird.atlasing.org/Atlas/CO/>) shows one probable breeding record near Boulder, *Boulder*. That report probably pertains to the male Scarlet Tanager found in Gregory Canyon in 2007 that returned the following two springs. That tanager apparently defended a territory, but a mate or offspring were never detected.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

The Committee recognizes that its “not accepted” decisions may upset those individuals whose documentations did not receive endorsement as state records. We heartily acknowledge that those who make the effort to submit documentation certainly care whether or not their reports are accepted. However, non-accepted reports do not necessarily suggest that the CBRC believes the observer misidentified or did not see the species. A non-accepted report only indicates that, in the opinion of at least two of the seven Committee members, the documentation did not provide enough evidence to support the identification of the species reported. Many non-accepted reports do not adequately describe the bird(s) observed or adequately rule out similarly looking species. For more information on what the CBRC considers during its review, the Committee recommends that observers consult Leukering (2004), which is available through the

CBRC website at <http://www.cfobirds.org/records/reports.htm>, when writing documentation of a rare bird.

All non-accepted reports may be reconsidered by the Committee if new information is provided (e.g., photos, supplemental documentation). We summarize below why the following reports were not accepted.

Mexican Duck – *Anas platyrhynchos diazi*. The Committee required two voting rounds to reach a decision regarding documentation of an adult female duck at Russell Lakes SWA, *Saguache*, 28 March 2011 (2011-22; 4-3, 2-5). The observer noted that separation from Mottled Duck (*A. fulvigula*) was “perhaps not possible” for this individual. Several Committee members commented on the observer’s uncertainty in their vote to not accept. An adult male in eclipse (alternate) plumage was reported near Punkin Center, *Lincoln*, 22 July 2011 (2011-102; 3-4). The eclipse plumages of our “regular” Mallard and the Mexican Duck subspecies are very similar, creating a further conundrum regarding separation of these two forms in summer. When considering the extent of hybridization between these forms, the identification challenge is substantial enough for the CBRC to conservatively not accept documentation lacking physical evidence or considerable description of plumage features and discussion on the individual’s phenotypic purity, which this report did not provide.

Brown Pelican – *Pelecanus occidentalis*. Documentation for a reported immature at Williams Creek Res., *Hinsdale*, 15 July 2010, required two

voting rounds for the Committee to reach a decision (2010-117; 4-3, 3-4). The documentation included photos of the bird. Unfortunately, the small image size did not definitively support the species identification and the report’s written description did not provide enough details for several members to conclude without a doubt that the bird was the reported species.

Krider’s Red-tailed Hawk – *Buteo jamaicensis krideri*. Photos of an adult observed in flight near Lafayette, *Boulder*, 2 April 2011 (2011-29; 5-2, 3-4) were submitted to two outside experts by the documenting observer, and their comments were included in the report. Notably, the observer did not submit this bird to the CBRC as a pure Krider’s, having obtained this outside input. Both experts considered the hawk to be a Krider’s type, but noted the difficulty in confidently labeling it as a “pure” Krider’s. One expert specifically mentioned the probability of introgression with the Eastern subspecies *borealis*. The question of where on the introgression spectrum the CBRC considers an individual “acceptable” is open-ended. In this case, because the bird was identified by an outside expert as a probable intergrade, several dissenting Committee members noted that the bird did not fit the phenotypic definition of a “pure” individual and should not be considered a record of that subspecies.

Vega Herring Gull – *Larus argentatus vegae*. Our understanding of Vega Herring Gull taxonomic relationship is incomplete, with some authorities recognizing the taxon as a subspecies of Herring Gull (AOU 1957, Grant

1986) and others, more recently, as a full species (Olsen and Larsson 2004, Howell and Dunn 2007). For simplicity, the (sub)species generally looks like a Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) in all plumages, with adults having a slightly darker mantle than does the form of Herring Gull (*L. a. smithsonianus*) occurring regularly in the state. The report submitted to the CBRC was of a first-cycle individual at Lake Loveland, Larimer, 22 February 2011 (2011-20; 0-7). The Committee held this report to a higher standard than other reports since it would constitute a first state record (and one of only a handful in the lower U.S.) for this taxon. The Committee received outside expert opinion which did not endorse the identification as a Vega Herring Gull. Given this outside opinion and individual Committee members' own experience with and understanding of the high degree of plumage variation in the Herring Gull, none of the CBRC members supported the report as pertaining to the *vegae* subspecies.

Chihuahuan Raven – *Corvus cryptoleucus*. The photographic documentations of an adult near Blanca, Costilla, 20 August 2009 (2009-81; 5-2, 3-4), and another near Longmont, Boulder, 23 April 2011 (2011-38; 3-4), were inconclusive for several Committee members. The CBRC remains conservative in accepting out-of-range Chihuahuan Raven reports given the identification challenges posed by Colorado's two raven species.

Pacific Wren – *Troglodytes pacificus*. With publication of the *Fifty-first Supplement to the American Or-*

nithologists' Union Checklist of North American Birds (Chesser et al. 2010), the eastern and western forms of the North American Winter Wren were each recognized as distinct species from their Old World counterpart (now Eurasian Wren *T. troglodytes*; see Leukering and Pieplow 2010 for more discussion on the split). Unfortunately, aside from seasonal and geographic ranges in which both new species were noted for Colorado, Chesser et al. (2010) gave little information regarding plumage differences of the two new species. David Sibley created a webpage shortly after Chesser et al. (2010) was published to help birders identify the two species (<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2010/08/distinguishing-pacific-and-winter-wrens/>). This webpage remains the best online resource for identification, while Leukering and Pieplow (2010) is a valuable publication to keep a copy of in the car. David Sibley accurately forewarned that the identification information provided on the website "requires field testing....for there will surely be a lot of new discoveries and refinements over the next few years." While the identification challenges are getting sorted out in the field, the CBRC has reviewed six documented occurrences on which the Committee was not able to reach a positive decision due to identification ambiguity or similar concerns. As new identification information becomes available, the CBRC may revisit these reports. For the sake of brevity, the six reports (all of single individuals) are listed herein without discussion of individual circumstances: Gregory Canyon,

Boulder, 10 November 2009 (2009-92; 5-2, 3-4); Fountain Creek Regional Park, El Paso, 15 December 2009 (2009-91; 5-2, 3-4); Last Chance, Washington, 9 October 2010 (2010-129; 1-6); Wheatridge Greenbelt, Jefferson, 8 November 2010 (2010-174; 2-5); Fort Collins, Larimer, 15 November 2010 (2010-148; 4-3, 3-4); and Bear Canyon Trail, Boulder, 19 December 2010 (2010-165; 1-6).

Rufous-collared Sparrow – *Zonotrichia capensis*. The discovery of a singing male in Georgetown, Clear Creek, in May 2010 prompted considerable discourse on the probability of its being a wild, naturally occurring vagrant and, therefore, a first U.S. record of the species (2011-56; 0-7). The CBRC received only two documentations for this sparrow despite its being observed by many (potentially more than a hundred) birders over the course of its stay. It was observed until at least 6 August 2010. The photographs in the two documentations clearly supported the identification as a Rufous-collared Sparrow, and outside expert opinion placed it as one of the non-migratory northern subspecies in southern Mexico and Central

America (also see <http://earbirding.com/blog/archives/3112> for commentary on the bird's songtypes, and geographic variation in the species). The CBRC was reluctant to accept this as a first U.S. record due to concerns about its provenance in the absence of precedent for extralimital movement by this species in the northern portion of its range in Mexico. Should a pattern of vagrancy develop, the CBRC may revisit this report.

Eastern Towhee – *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*. The reporting observer noted that the adult male towhee at Plaster Res., Broomfield, 19 April 2011 (2011-34; 4-3, 0-7), had only a few white spots on the wings and sang a song unlike that of Spotted Towhee (*P. maculatus*). Several CBRC members were concerned about the lack of discussion ruling out a possible hybrid, and one member mentioned that hybrids may sing either species' song.

Purple Finch – *Carpodacus purpureus*. The description of a female-plumaged finch on the Grand Mesa, Mesa, 16 April 2011, did not sufficiently rule out the more likely Cassin's Finch (*C. cassinii*) in the opinion of a majority of CBRC members (2011-32; 3-4).

REPORTERS AND CITED OBSERVERS

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Stealth Gull: Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull Hybrids in the North American Interior

Steven G. Mlodinow

There may be an imposter in the next flock of gulls you look at. You might think it an odd Herring Gull, or be happy to have found a Thayer's Gull, or thrilled to be looking at a Glaucous-winged Gull. Yet, in the end, it may well be none of these. It might be a Glaucous-winged × Herring Gull hybrid.

Glaucous-winged Gulls and Herring Gulls have been known to miscegenate in south-coastal Alaska for quite some time (Williamson and Peyton 1963). However, the wintering range of Herring × Glaucous-winged Gulls seems to have been largely unrecognized, or ignored, until the late 1970s, when hybrids were noted as occurring as far south as southern California (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Breeding Range

Patten (1980) provides the only extensive evaluation of the Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull hybridization zone. This region is approximately 480 km long, stretching from Glacier Bay to Cook Inlet in Alaska, and ranging from 30-160 km inland (Williamson and Peyton 1963). Preferred sites show mixed freshwater and maritime influences (Patten 1980). In the center of this zone, breeding colonies consist of more hybrids than "pure" birds, and hybrid fitness is equal to that of either parent species (Patten 1980). Patten (1980) suggested that man-made food sources (e.g., garbage dumps and offal from fisheries) contributed to the extent of hybridization. Therefore the size of the hybridization zone, or the extent of cross-breeding, may have changed significantly since 1980, but no further extensive studies seem to have taken place (T. Tobish, S. Heinel pers. comm.). Patten (1980) suggested that the hybrid zone might be larger than his study indicated, and this seems borne out by a record of a mixed pair from British Columbia's interior (Merilees 1974).

Non-breeding Range

The Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull winter range extends along the Pacific Coast from southeast Alaska (Heinel 1997, Heinel and Piston 2009) to northern Baja California. However, this topic engendered mostly cursory attention until the late 1990s. Heinel (1997)

found that most of the Herring-type gulls during winter in Ketchikan, Alaska, showed signs of hybridization with Glaucous-winged Gull, and that hybrids were present there from early October through March. In February 2005, a careful examination of 1500–2000 large gulls in Renton, King County, Washington revealed that apparent hybrids constituted 25% of the flock, including 10% Herring × Glaucous-winged Gulls, 10% Glaucous-winged × Western Gulls, and another 5% that defied labeling (Mlodinow et al. 2005). During late October 2011, approximately 3% of 1000 large gulls at the mouth of the Elwha River on Washington's Olympic Peninsula were judged to be Herring × Glaucous-winged Gulls (S. Mlodinow, pers. obs.) Along the central California coast, recent observations revealed that up to 12% of migrant Herring/Glaucous-winged-type gulls during late January and February displayed hybrid characteristics (Howell and Dunn 2007).

That this cross occasionally wanders into the interior was first noted in the Salton Sink during the late 1970s and 1980s (Patten et al. 1994). However, Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull hybrids were not detected in eastern Oregon or eastern Washington until December 2004, when one was found on the Columbia River near Cold Springs, Oregon (Mlodinow et al. 2005). Subsequent records on eBird suggest that these hybrids may be annual east to the Okanogan Valley of British Columbia and Washington and the Columbia Basin of Washington and Oregon.

North America's Interior

What about the North American interior? The first record from an interior state or province is of a bird photographed near Lafayette, Boulder County, Colorado, 13-30 January 2004; at the time, the identification was rather tentative (Wood and Faulkner 2004), but now seems rather apparent (see Fig. 3). Since then, there have been approximately thirteen records east of Pacific Coast states, seven from the winter of 2011–2012:

- 1) First cycle, Logan River Wetlands, Cache County, Utah, 19 October 2008 (photo, Ryan O'Donnell, pers. comm., eBird);
- 2) Second cycle, Winthrop, Lake County, Illinois, 2 January 2010 (photo, M. Retter, pers. comm.);
- 3) First cycle, Anthem Ponds, Broomfield County, Colorado, 21 February 2010 (Semo et al. 2010, Fig. 1);
- 4) First cycle, Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin, 28 February 2010 (photo, A. Ayyash, pers. comm.);
- 5) Adult, Carlyle Lake Wildlife Management Area, Clinton County, Illinois, 2 February 2011 (photo, D. Kassebaum, pers. comm.);

- 6) First cycle, Drake Lake, Severance, Weld County, Colorado, 6-14 April 2011 (Leukering and Schmoker 2011, Fig. 2)
- 7) First cycle, Strike Wildlife Management Area, Owyhee County, Idaho, 10 December 2011 (description, Heidi Ware, Jay Carlisle, pers. comm., eBird);
- 8) Second cycle, Siena Pond, Broomfield County, Colorado, 14 January 2012 (Fig. 4);
- 9) Adult, McIntosh Reservoir, Boulder County, Colorado, 19 January 2012 (description, Bryan Guarente, pers. comm.);
- 10) Second cycle, Anthem Ponds, Broomfield County, Colorado, 20 February 2012 (photo, Bill Schmoker, pers. comm., eBird);
- 11) First cycle, Lindon, Utah, 10 February 2012 (photo, Jeff Cooper, pers. comm.);
- 12) Second cycle, Prewitt Reservoir, Washington County, Colorado, 3 March 2012 (photo, Glenn Walbek, pers. comm.);
- 13) Two first-cycle birds, Prewitt Reservoir, Washington County, 11–17 March 2012 (photo, S. Mlodinow, G. Walbek, eBird).

This recent spate of records seems likely due, at least in part, to increased observer effort and awareness.

Identification

Currently, the “problem” in Colorado and other interior states and provinces is that some Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gulls are likely being identified as other species or hybrids, not vice versa. What could a Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gull be mistaken for? Based on my experience, a Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gull is most likely to be misidentified as a Glaucous-winged Gull, Thayer’s Gull, Glaucous-winged \times Western Gull, or Herring Gull, probably in that order. To my eye, most Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gulls look like hefty Thayer’s Gulls, no matter what their age. Also, Thayer’s Gulls during their first winter tend to have very crisply plumaged wings and back, whereas Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gulls of the same age tend to have rather smudgy plumage in these areas. I’ve found four of these hybrids in Colorado, identifying three as a Thayer’s Gull at first glance. The other bird caused me to ponder Glaucous-winged Gull initially. That being said, the phenotypic range of these hybrids spans that of both parental types (Patten 1980), meaning that a Herring \times Glaucous-winged might look very much like either parent. Glaucous-winged \times Western Gulls can also resemble Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gulls, as both hybrids tend to look like Glaucous-winged Gulls with atypically dark wingtips. Glaucous-winged \times Western Gulls, however, tend to be rather large birds with large bills when compared with Herring \times Glaucous-winged Gulls, and they are

often darker with more extensive dark on the wingtips. Some overlap, however, does exist, leaving some birds unidentifiable.

For a more detailed discussion of identification, it would be hard to match that in Howell and Dunn's *Gulls of the Americas* (2007). Instead, I will use photos of Glaucous-winged × Herring Gulls (mostly from Colorado) to elucidate key points. All photos are from Colorado, unless noted otherwise. Figs. 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b appear on p. 202; Figs. 3, 4, 5, and 6 appear on p. 203; and Figs. 7, 8, and 9 appear on the back cover.

Figure 1a: First-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Anthem Ponds, Broomfield County, on 21 February 2010. This bird has a definite Thayer's Gull "jizz" to it, but the plumage is rather like that of a Glaucous-winged Gull with darker-than-normal folded primaries. Note that the bill is somewhat thick for a Thayer's Gull but smallish for a Glaucous-winged. The smudgy quality to the wing coverts and the moderately extensive presence of second-generation (gray) feathers on the bird's back are Glaucous-winged Gull characters. Most first-cycle Thayer's Gulls, even in late February, would have few, if any, gray back feathers, and most would have more patterned wing coverts. A Herring Gull should have far darker wingtips and be more distinctly marked on the wing coverts. A Glaucous-winged × Western Gull would sport a heftier bill and, mostly likely, a darker back. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 1b: Same bird in flight. The primary tips are a bit dark for Glaucous-winged Gull, and the bill appears a bit narrow for that species. On the other hand, this bird seems rather barrel-chested and broad-winged for a Thayer's Gull. The primary pattern would be atypical for Thayer's Gull, with the dark brown rather concentrated at the feather tips. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 2a: First-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull at Drake Lake, Weld County, 6 April 2011. In this photo, this gull looks very much like one of those worn spring Thayer's Gulls with somewhat faded wingtips. The bill appears thin enough for Thayer's Gull as well. A hint that it is something else comes from the rather short wings, which barely protrude past the tail. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 2b: The same bird at Drake Lake on 8 April 2011. In this photo, the bill appears too bulky to be that of a Thayer's Gull, and the body is rather stout for that species. The extent of dark on the wingtip is beyond what one would see in a Glaucous-winged Gull. A Glaucous-winged × Western Gull would typically be larger-billed, especially when figure 2a is taken into consideration. Most are darker bodied as well. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.



Fig. 1a: First-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Anthem Ponds, Broomfield County, 21 Feb 2010. Photo by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 1b: The bird from Fig. 1a in flight. Photo by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 2a: First-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Drake Lake, Weld County, 6 Apr 2011. Photo by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 2b: The bird from Fig. 2a, same location, 8 Apr 2011. Photo by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 3: Colorado's first Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull, Prince Lake #1, Boulder County, 13 Jan 2004. Photo by Bill Schmoker



Fig. 4: Second-cycle Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull, Siena Pond, Broomfield County, 14 Jan 2012. Photo by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 5: Immature (second- or third-cycle) Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull, Ketchikan, Alaska, 20 February 2007. Photo by Steven C. Heinl



Fig. 6: First-cycle Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull, Ketchikan, Alaska, 12 February 2012. Photo by Steven C. Heinl

Figure 3: Colorado's first Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, at Prince Lake #1, near Lafayette, Boulder County, photographed on 13 January 2004. If their ranges intersected, one could easily be forgiven for mistaking this bird for a Thayer's × Glaucous-winged Gull. The plumage is nearly that of a Glaucous-winged Gull, being smudgy and rather uniform. The structure is more befitting a Thayer's Gull, with a somewhat rounded, small-looking head and fairly delicate bill. However, a clue that this bird is neither comes from the rather pallid iris (not easily visible in this photo). Irides this color would be unusual in adults of either Glaucous-winged or Thayer's Gull and much more so in an immature. A combination of Herring Gull and Glaucous-winged Gull genes explains this bird's phenotype well. Photograph by Bill Schmoker.

Figure 4: Second-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull at Siena Pond, Broomfield County, 14 January 2012. This bird looks much like a short-winged Thayer's Gull with a pale eye (not easily detected in photo, but apparent during actual observation) or a short-winged Herring Gull with pale wingtips. Indeed, the wing length is rather typical for Glaucous-winged Gull, and in flight the extent of brown on the upper primaries was more limited than typical of Herring Gulls. A Glaucous-winged Gull, or Glaucous-winged × Western Gull, would have a larger bill, and Glaucous-winged a darker eye. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 5: Immature (second- or third-cycle) Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Ketchikan, Alaska, 20 February 2007. This bird has the heavy smudging on chest and upper belly of a Glaucous-winged Gull and a dark eye like that of Glaucous-winged, but the primaries are far too dark. The wingtips are somewhat like those of a Thayer's Gull, being brown (not blackish) with pale tips. However, the relatively short wings and massive bill would argue against Thayer's Gull. A dainty Glaucous-winged × Western Gull might look like this bird, but would typically be darker-backed and larger-headed; however, I am not certain that this hybrid cross can be eliminated with certainty from this one photo alone. Photograph by Steven C. Heinl.

Figure 6: First-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Ketchikan, Alaska, 12 February 2012. The coarsely speckled wing coverts and medium-brown primaries might suggest Thayer's Gull. However, the bird's stocky build and hefty bill eliminate that species. A Glaucous-winged × Western Gull would typically be darker-backed, and the wing coverts would not be so coarsely marked. Photograph by Steven C. Heinl.

Figure 7 (back cover, top): Second-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull at the Elwha River Mouth, Washington, 28 October

2011. This Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull has some Thayer's Gull-like aspects but is more similar to a Herring Gull. The most distinctive characters arguing against a pure Herring Gull are the rather limited secondary bar and the somewhat pale brown wingtips. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 8 (back cover, middle): Adult Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull at Elwha River Mouth, Washington, 28 October 2011. The wings of this bird, with their primaries still growing in, are quite suggestive of Thayer's Gull but do not resemble those of Herring or Glaucous-winged Gull. However, this bird's head looks like a blend of Herring and Glaucous-winged: The eye is like that of a Herring Gull, only a bit muddy in color, and the bill is rather sizable, like that of a Glaucous-winged. The body is large and bulky, unlike that of a Thayer's Gull. Glaucous-winged × Western Gull can be eliminated by the primary pattern and somewhat pallid mantle color. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Figure 9 (back cover, bottom): First-cycle Thayer's Gull, Everett, Washington, 20 December 2010. Note how sharply marked this bird is, with medium warm-brown wing coverts and back feathers, all crisply edged in white. The wings are proportionately long and the bill slender. By comparison, a Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull would have smudgier upperparts, with shorter wings and a larger bill. Additionally, most hybrids would already have molted in some gray back feathers of "first-winter" plumage, whereas Thayer's Gulls often retain their juvenile back feathers (as this bird has) into January or February. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

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Changes to the Main Review List

Doug Faulkner

Chair, Colorado Bird Records Committee

The purpose of the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) is to provide a repository for information regarding the records of rare or unusual birds within the state of Colorado. In order to perform this function, the CBRC collects, reviews, renders opinions on, and permanently archives all documentation concerning such records. The list of rare and unusual species for which the CBRC requests documentation is maintained as the Main Review List (http://www.cfbirds.org/cbrcfiles/state_review_list.pdf). A Conditional List is used for species considered rare by geography or seasonality (see Semo et al. 2002). The CBRC recently reviewed the Main Review List for species that warrant removal, as well as for missing species that it considered should be on the list.

Per Section VII(D)2(b) of the CBRC bylaws (http://www.cfbirds.org/downloads/business/CBRC_Bylaws_Revised_11-3-2010.pdf), the guidelines for which species may be considered for removal from the list of review species are as follows:

1. there have been on average four or more sightings per year in the previous 10-year period,
2. there are more than ten accepted records, and
3. in the opinion of a majority of CBRC members, the species no longer requires further documentation, as the status and distribution of that species has been established.

A species may be added to the review list if the CBRC desires documentation to assess its status in the state.

The species included in this report were removed or added by a majority vote of the full CBRC. It is the intent of this Chair for the CBRC to review the Main Review List on an annual basis and to report on the Committee's decision in a timely manner.

In the species accounts below, note that the number of records for West Slope counties is mentioned separately. However, no attempt has been made to dissect the state in order to provide a precise accounting of each record or locality, and the same attention is not given to other parts of the state where these birds may be rare, such as the San Luis Valley, montane counties, and North Park.

SPECIES REMOVED FROM THE MAIN REVIEW LIST

Red-throated Loon – *Gavia stellata*

Except for an undated specimen of an immature collected at Antero Reservoir, *Park*, all of the state's records are from 1973 and later, reflecting the value of having a centralized organization (Colorado Field Ornithologists) and records committee to review and archive documentation of species considered rare in Colorado. Thirty-four of the 45 CBRC records are from the fall season, with a nearly even split between juveniles and adults. The earliest fall record is from 12 October, but the remaining nine October records fall after 20 October. November has the highest number of records (18), which span the month. There are six records for December and just one for January. The January record is anomalous not only for being the lone midwinter record, but also because it represents the longest staying individual in the state (Pueblo Res., *Pueblo*, 3 January – 26 February 2008, 54 days), barely surpassing a bird at Missouri Heights Res., *Garfield*, 4 May – 25 June 1973, that stayed for 53 days. The species has been observed at other seasons, particularly spring, which has eight records scattered from early April to mid-May. The species is rare in summer, with single records for June and July. There are no records for March or August. West Slope counties with records include *Delta* (1), *Garfield* (1), and *Mesa* (2).

Glossy Ibis – *Plegadis falcinellus*

The state's first record is represent-

ed by an adult at Sweitzer Lake, *Delta*, 27 March 1986. Between 1986 and 1995 there were only three records of the species, but from 1995-2004 it averaged 3.3 accepted records a year, and since 2005 it has averaged 4.3 accepted records a year. The species has become expected in the state, including on the West Slope, which has records for *Delta* (1), *Eagle* (1), *Garfield* (1), *La Plata* (6), *Moffat* (1), and *Routt* (1). Pastorius Reservoir in *La Plata* has been a reliable location for at least one Glossy Ibis in late April since 2006. Nearly all of the state's records are of phenotypically pure adults in breeding condition found during spring migration in April and May. At least one of the two records for July (Alamosa NWR, *Alamosa*, 10 July 2003) is interesting in that the season and the location near known White-faced Ibis (*P. chihi*) colonies suggest the possibility of local breeding. There remain identification challenges with non-breeding-plumaged individuals, juveniles, and possible hybrids, but the CBRC has 66 records in its database, and additional records of phenotypically pure individuals are of diminishing value to the CBRC's mission to maintain a database of rare species records.

Red Phalarope – *Phalaropus fulicarius*

The only historical record for this species is provided by a specimen collected near Loveland, *Larimer*, 25 July 1895. The CBRC's 47 records indicate that this species is mainly a fall migrant through Colorado. Thirty-two records are from September and October, with outlying migrants observed

in August (3) and early November (2). Twenty-two of these autumnal records fall between 15 September and 15 October, suggesting peak migration during that four-week period. Red Phalarope is a very rare spring migrant, with five records for April and May. Summer records, which could be either late spring or early fall migrants, consist of two records each for June and July. There are no records for the December – March period. Most records are of adults in basic plumage. West Slope records are from *Delta* (1), *Mesa* (2), and *Rio Blanco* (1).

Black-legged Kittiwake – *Rissa tridactyla*

There is one record from prior to the CBRC's inception, of one collected in *Adams*, 13 November 1932. Over half (26) of the CBRC's 45 records occurred in November, and the only two October records are from late in that month, on 27 and 29 October. Including another eight records for early to mid-December, this species is considered a late fall migrant in Colorado. The species is very rare in winter (two records for January and none for February). Spring migrants have been observed during March (3), April (2), and May (2). There are no summer or early fall records (June – September). There is a single record for the West Slope (Connected Lakes, *Mesa*, 16 November 1991). Most records are of juveniles, with just a handful of adults and second-cycle individuals.

Great Black-backed Gull – *Larus marinus*

Colorado's first record is of one at

Centennial Park, *Arapahoe*, 3-4 January 1980. The species was not recorded again until November 1987. With just single-day occurrences of another three individuals representing three separate records in 1988 and 1989, it wasn't until 1993 that the species began to become a regular component of the state's avifauna. Since 1993, multiple individuals of this species have been recorded most years. The species has become so regular that the CBRC has experienced "documentation fatigue" from birders in the state over the past several years. Great Black-backed Gulls can be expected in Colorado from November to March. There are two records for both September and October, and single records for April and May. The April individual remained through mid-July; however, there are no records for which June or July is the initial month of observation. Adults comprise the majority of records. The West Slope does not have a record of this species.

Vermilion Flycatcher – *Pyrocephalus rubinus*

Two historical records are of individuals collected in May 1950 and May 1965. The species has been recorded in the state nearly annually since 1971. Half (22) of the state's 44 records occurred in April, with another ten in May. The four records from March are all from the latter half of that month, outlining the period when migrants may first be expected in the state. The species is very rare at other times of the year. The remaining eight records are from June (3), September (3), and December (2). At

least one of the June records (2011-85; Thompson Ranch, *Lincoln*, 8-9 June 2011) is of an individual first recorded in a previous month, in this case May. This exemplifies the CBRC's need to remind birders that first and last dates are important to understanding the patterns of occurrence of rare species in the state. The CBRC's database is meant to be a standalone source. Documentation from only a portion of an individual's stay in the state creates an unnecessary burden on those using this database since it causes them to also research other sources (e.g., eBird, News from the Field, *North American Birds*) for a more complete date span. Vermilion Flycatcher is known to have nested in the state on several occasions, although no nest is known to have produced fledglings. West Slope records are from *La Plata* (1), *Mesa* (1), and *Montrose* (1).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – *Tyrannus forficatus*

Two were collected at an unknown location in *Baca* in 1923 for Colorado's first and second state records. Colorado has an additional three records prior to 1991. In 1996, the species started a pattern of nearly annual occurrence in the state, with multiple records in most years. The highest number of annual records is four in both 2005 and 2006. Eastern Colorado is on the periphery of the species' Great Plains breeding range, so a few individuals may be expected to occur in southeastern Colorado in spring and summer. The species is typically first recorded in late April (seven records for 16-29 Apr). May

has 13 records, June seven, and July three. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is rarely recorded during fall migration, with records for August (4), September (2), and October (1). The species has not been recorded from November through March. The species is a rare nester in Colorado. *Eagle* is the only West Slope county with a record in the CBRC database, although Righter et al. (2004) state that there are ten for the area covered in that publication, and Dexter (1995) reports on a possible hybrid pairing, with a Western Kingbird (*T. verticalis*), in *Garfield*.

Wood Thrush – *Hylocichla mustelina*

Wood Thrush is primarily a spring and fall migrant in Colorado. Of the state's 35 records, 21 are from 2 April to 11 June, with 18 of these in May. There are 13 fall records for the period 13 September to 11 November. Eight of the fall records occurred in October. A pair collected in *Yuma* on 24 June 1915 represents the sole summer record. Colorado has two winter records, on 15 December 1984 and 8 January 1975. *Mesa* is the only West Slope county with a record (*Grand Junction*, 13-18 September 1972).

Varied Thrush – *Ixoreus naevius*

No records existed for this species until 1972, when one was documented for *Lakewood, Jefferson*, 27 November – 28 December. There are currently 46 records. The 1970s and 1980s each had four records, all in November and December. Five records come from the 1990s, including the first one for the month of October. Since 2000, multiple individuals of this species have

been recorded annually, except for 2005 which has one record, including four records each for 2006, 2007, and 2008. To date, the CBRC has reviewed four of seven documentations from an influx of this species in fall and winter 2011-12, and accepted all four. Varied Thrush is primarily found in Colorado from mid-October through the end of January. There are two records each for February and March. An adult female at Last Chance, *Washington*, 12 May 2006, represents the only spring record for Colorado. West Slope records are from *Delta* (1), *La Plata* (3), *Mesa* (1), and *Routt* (1).

Kentucky Warbler – *Geothlypis formosa*

One that resided in Bluebell Canyon, *Boulder*, 21 May – 21 June 1963, represents the state's first record. Kentucky Warbler has been recorded in most years since 1991. The most recorded in a single year is four in 2009. The species is strongly associated with spring migration, as 33 of the state's 39 records are of individuals occurring between 16 April and 1 June. Single males established territories in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, in 1998 and 2009, staying into July of both years. Fall records are few and far between. There is one record for August and two in October. The species has not been recorded in winter. Single individuals in *La Plata* and *Montrose* represent the only West Slope records.

Bay-breasted Warbler – *Setophaga castanea*

The species exploded onto the birding scene in 1973, the first year it was documented in the state, with

six records. The following year saw an incredible nine records for the species. Bay-breasted Warbler was recorded nearly annually through 1979. Interestingly, though there is only one record from the 1980s, in 1988, the species has been recorded nearly annually since 1995. Bay-breasted Warbler is recorded most frequently during spring migration (28 records), though the ten records spanning 5 September to 12 November suggest that it may routinely pass through the state during fall migration too. Twenty-three of the 28 spring records occurred in a narrow late-spring window, 15-31 May. Oddly, the only June records (six total) are from the 1970s. There is a single nesting record of a pair near Westcreek, *Douglas*, in 1978 (Kingery 1998). There are no West Slope records.

Blackburnian Warbler – *Setophaga fusca*

Unlike Bay-breasted Warbler, the Blackburnian Warbler is equally likely to occur in Colorado in spring and in fall. It has been of near-annual occurrence since 1983, with yearly high counts of four records in 1997 and 2000. The 29 spring records span 30 April to 1 June, while the 23 fall records are from 26 August to 18 November. The species has not been recorded in summer or winter. Birders on the West Slope have recorded the species on three occasions, once each in *Dolores*, *La Plata*, and *Montrose*.

Pine Warbler – *Setophaga pinus*

Pine Warbler may have been the most under-documented species on

the Main Review List. The species is the most “common” of the state’s rare warblers, and documentation fatigue has been contagious for several years. Nonetheless, the species has been documented annually since 2002. The highest number of records in a given year is five from 2005. Pine Warbler has been documented for every month, and is equally likely to occur during spring, fall, and winter. Only the summer months of June and July have few records (3 total). Single juveniles molting from juvenile to first basic plumage (Bonny Res., *Yuma*, 6 August 2005 and Ovid, *Sedgwick*, 4 July 2010) suggest breeding by this species in the region, if not in Colorado.

Yellow-throated Warbler – *Setophaga dominica*

The only state record prior to the CBRC’s inception is of a specimen collected in either June or July 1956. Yellow-throated Warbler is predominantly a spring migrant in Colorado, with 33 of the state’s 39 records from the period 3 April to 12 June, and 22 of those records in May. The species has been recorded thrice in fall (Denver, *Denver*, 14 October – 18 November 1989; San Luis, *Costilla*, 10 September 2009; Chico Basin Ranch, *Pueblo*, 12-13 September 2011) and twice in winter (Ft. Collins, *Larimer*, 7-9 December 1983; Cañon City, *Freemont*, 29 December 2003).

Scarlet Tanager – *Piranga olivacea*

Scarlet Tanager has been known in Colorado since 1902, when one was collected at Palmer Lake, *El Paso*,

17 May. Two additional pre-CBRC specimens residing at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science are from Pueblo, *Pueblo*, 20 May 1904, and Denver, *Denver*, 7 September 1956. Like Bay-breasted Warbler, the species was recorded on several occasions during the 1970s, but only once in the 1980s. Scarlet Tanager has been recorded nearly annually since 1995, with the high count of four in 2000. The species is primarily recorded in spring (18 of the state’s 34 records are from 30 April to 27 May). The eight summer records include a male that established a territory in Gregory Canyon, *Boulder*, 2007-2009. However, the only breeding record is of an adult male observed feeding an apparent hybrid (with Western Tanager *P. ludoviciana*) fledgling in North Cheyenne Canyon, *El Paso*, 8-9 August 2011. It is more rarely reported in fall (eight records from 10 August – 19 November), and there is a single record for winter (Ft. Collins, *Larimer*, 6-20 December 2003).

Painted Bunting – *Passerina ciris*

The state’s first record (Mesa Verde National Park, *Montezuma*, 29 August 1938) is also notable for being one of only three records for the West Slope (also Delta, *Delta*, 23-26 March 1998, and Placerville, *San Miguel*, 26 July 2002). The species was recorded five times during the 1970s and 1980s. However, it has been of near-annual occurrence since 1991. The annual high count is of four recorded in 2002. Spring arrivals are expected in late April (two records for 21 and 28 April), but the bulk of spring records

are from May (19). Painted Bunting has not been confirmed as a breeding species in Colorado, but several records for late June and July suggest the possibility. The species is rare in fall migration, with two records in late August and three in September. There are no records from October through mid-March.

SPECIES MOVED TO THE CONDITIONAL REVIEW LIST

Least Bittern – *Ixobrychus exilis*

Bailey and Niedrach (1965) considered this species to be an uncommon summer resident, with multiple nesting occurrences in *Adams, Boulder, Denver, Logan/Washington, and Weld*. It no longer holds that status in the upper reaches of the Front Range, although it is still recorded from time to time in *Boulder* and *Larimer*. With 25 state records, the species would not normally be considered a candidate for complete removal from the Main Review List. However, recent nesting attempts and its regular occurrence in southeastern Colorado have prompted the CBRC to stop soliciting documentations for that part of the state. Twenty-one of the state's 25 records are about equally split among May, June, and July. There is a single record for August and one for September. Least Bittern has been recorded on the West Slope in *Archuleta* (1) and *Mesa* (1).

Hepatic Tanager – *Piranga flava*

The CBRC database contains 23 records for this species, a total generally not high enough to warrant con-

sideration for removal from the Main Review List. However, the species is known to regularly breed in southeastern Colorado, particularly in *Huerfano* and *Las Animas*. Therefore, the CBRC no longer requests documentation for sightings in southeastern Colorado. Several individuals, most presumably spring migrant overshoots, have been recorded elsewhere in the state, including *Boulder, El Paso, Garfield, Jefferson, Montezuma, and Yuma*.

SPECIES ADDED TO THE MAIN REVIEW LIST

Golden-winged Warbler – *Vermivora chrysoptera*

The CBRC has elected to add Golden-winged Warbler to the Main Review List. The species was on the list until 2001 (Semo et al. 2002). With the acceptance of one in *Durango, La Plata*, 20 May 2010, there are currently 33 records for this species. However, there appear to be fewer reports of this species in the past several years than for other warbler species that, until recently, maintained a position on the list (e.g., Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler). From time to time, the CBRC may add a species to determine its status in the state. Such recent actions include assessing the status of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans (*Cygnus buccinator* and *C. columbianus*, respectively) and the Red Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca iliaca/zaboria*). Therefore, the CBRC invites the birding community to submit documentation for sightings of this species to help us ascertain its current status in the state.

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Winter 2011–2012 (December–February)

Joel Such and Marcel Such

The Snowy Owl is a truly charismatic species. In birders, it can arouse pathetic cases of “twitching fever,” causing normally stay-at-home feeder watchers to drive hundreds of miles in search of this stereotypical bird of the far Arctic reaches. Back at home on the local birding listservs, fierce arguments rage on the ethics of close approach, trespassing, and the baiting of owls for photographic purposes. In non-birders, the “Hedwig factor” can take effect (Harry Potter had a Snowy Owl, if you didn’t know), making the most ornithologically oblivious people turn their heads and gawk. “I thought those were only in movies!” some remark.

So when there is a so-called “invasion year” – when large numbers of these large white owls move south to abnormally warmer climes – temporary chaos ensues. The causes of these irruptions are not terribly well understood, but they are probably generated by fluctuation in the arctic rodent population, which in turn is caused by temperature swings and the availability of lemming food. Whatever the cause, this past winter happened to be one of those legendary irruption years. With local and national news outlets buzzing about Snowy Owls turning up as far south as Texas, literally thousands flocked to see these often starving and nearly-dead birds. Colorado itself hosted nine birds during the winter season, with especially popular individuals being seen near Denver in Adams and Arapahoe Counties.

In addition to the Snowy Owl irruption, there were other abnormalities about the winter season. First and foremost was the weather. Despite starting off with a major cold front and large amounts of snowfall, winter stalled out. For the second half of December and all of January, the temperature ranged from 5.3–7.6°F above normal, with little to no precipitation. In February the temperatures finally dropped, averaging 4.1° under the norm despite the lack of any major cold snaps. More significant was the 22.1 inches of snow that fell on the Front Range during that month, making for the second snowiest February in Denver history.

These warmer temperatures resulted in many interesting phenomena. Many of the typical Front Range gulling hot spots – the Valmont Reservoir complex, Lake Loveland, the Weld County Landfill, Union Reservoir, etcetera – were less productive than usual due to the lack of ice on most reservoirs. In a typical winter,



"Mexican" Mallard, Pueblo City Park, Pueblo, 25 Jan 2012. Photo by Bill Maynard



Northern Cardinal, Arkansas River, Pueblo Reservoir State Park, Pueblo, 25 Jan 2012. Photo by Bill Maynard



Snowy Owl, CR 12, Prowers, Jan 2012. Photo by Dave Leatherman



Bullock's Oriole, Fort Collins, Larimer, 2 Jan 2012. Photo by Cree Bol

most bodies of water are frozen over, concentrating the gulls and other water-dependent species in a few select ice-free locations. On the annual “Gullapalooza” outing at Valmont Reservoir in Boulder County, the gull flock decreased from the 8,000 of years past to a mere 3,000 in 2012, with much less species diversity. Despite the lackluster gulling in most areas of the state, Broomfield County put its name on the roster of top spots for larophiles (or “gull-freaks”), with most of the winter’s rare gulls being found in this tiny, mostly urban county.

The mild winter also allowed many mountain species to stay closer to their breeding habitats, due to an unusual accessibility of winter food stores. Typical wanderers such as Red Crossbill, Evening Grosbeak, and Golden-crowned Kinglet were conspicuously absent from their haunts in the cemeteries, shelterbelts, riparian corridors, and parks of the lowlands. Some summer breeders that normally migrate south for the winter, such as Spotted Sandpiper, Say’s Phoebe, House Wren, Hermit Thrush, and Great-tailed Grackle, also put in more winter appearances throughout the state than normal. We believe this can also be attributed to the warm temperatures, which caused unseasonable availability of the insects that make up most of the diet of many of the aforementioned species.

“News from the Field” contains news and reports of birds sighted in Colorado. These reports are compiled from online discussion groups, rare bird alerts, and eBird (ebird.org), with invaluable contributions provided by a statewide network of informants.

We would like to thank the many contributors for sharing their sightings, as well as the regional compilers and reviewers for adding their insight regarding county and regional rarities and breeding species. No matter your level of expertise, you are encouraged to send your bird reports to COBirds, cobirds@googlegroups.com, eBird, <https://ebird.org>, and/or the West Slope Birding Network, wbsn@yahoogroups.com. All of these reports are tabulated by your regional compilers, and are sent in taxonomic order, along with comments, to the “News from the Field” editors for summary.

Note 1 – The reports contained herein are largely unchecked, and the report editors do not necessarily vouch for their authenticity. Underlined species are those for which the Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) requests documentation. We strongly recommend that you submit your sightings of these “review” species through the CFO website at <http://cfobirds.org/CBRC/login.php>. This is the preferred method to submit your documentation. However, if you are “technologically impaired” and require a hardcopy form, you may use the one located on the inside of this journal’s mailing cover. Mailed

documentation of rarities should be sent to CBRC chairman Doug Faulkner (address on form).

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

Abbreviations: **CBC** – Christmas Bird Count; **CR** – County Road; **LCCW** – Lamar Community College Woods, *Prowers*; **m.ob.** – many observers; **NWR** – National Wildlife Refuge; **Res.** – Reservoir; **SP** – State Park; **SWA** – State Wildlife Area; **WS** – West Slope, areas west of the continental divide.

Greater White-fronted Goose:

All WS reports: 1 adult south of Durango *La Plata* 8-18 Dec (RMO, m.ob.); 12 at Confluence Park *Delta* through the whole season (m.ob.).

Ross's Goose: High count: 1500 birds at Jumbo Reservoir *Sedgwick* on 8 Jan (SM, TS). One WS report: 5 at Confluence Park *Delta* seen throughout the whole season (m.ob.).

Brant: All reports: 1 adult at Lake Cheraw *Otero* on 15 Dec (NMo, MPe et al.); and 2 adult “Atlantic” *hrota* subspecies at Chatfield SP *Douglas/Jefferson*, 30 Nov – 17 Dec (NK, GW, JRo, m.ob.).

Cackling Goose: There were 7 reports of 22 individuals of the *taverneri* subspecies reported from the counties

Boulder, *Broomfield*, and *Weld* from 14 Jan to 29 Feb (SM, TS, BS).

Goose hybrids: Snow Goose × Ross's Goose: 1 adult at Little Jumbo Res. *Logan* on 8 Jan (SM, TS); 1 imm at Jumbo Res. *Sedgwick* on 8 Jan (SM, TS); 1 imm at Kersey Dairy Ponds *Weld* on 19 Feb (SM, TS). Snow Goose × Canada Goose: 1 in Grand Junction *Mesa* on 18 Dec (DB); 1 adult at LUNA Res. *Weld* on 5 Feb (SM, TS); 1 at Greenlee Preserve, *Boulder*, 28 Jan (TF et al.). Snow Goose × Cackling Goose: 1 adult at N Sterling Res. *Logan* on 24 Dec (SM, TS); 1 adult at Waneka Res. *Boulder* on 14 Dec (SM); 1 adult at Frederick Recreational Area *Weld* on 15 Jan (SM, BS). Ross's Goose × Cackling Goose: 2 adults at Siena Pond *Broomfield* on 7 Jan (SM, CN); 1 adult at Frederick Recreational Area *Weld* on 15 Jan (SM, BS); 1 adult at Anthem Ranch *Broomfield* on 26 Feb (SM, BS).

Mute Swan: One report: Likely a feral bird, 1 adult in Greeley *Weld* throughout the season (SM, TS, m.ob.).

Trumpeter Swan: All reports: 1 at Confluence Park *Delta* from 15 Dec to 4 Jan (DG); 6-7 at Browns Park NWR *Moffat* from 2 Jan through end of season (DH, TMO); 1 adult at



Brant, Chatfield Reservoir, Jefferson, 18 Dec 2011. Photo by Dan Brooke

Valmont Res. *Boulder* from 15 Jan to 4 Feb (SM, BS et al.); 1 at Greenlee Preserve *Boulder* on 29 Dec (TF et al.).

Tundra Swan: All reports: 2 at Confluence Park *Delta* 3-17 Dec (DG); 6 in Montrose *Montrose* on

17 Dec (MS); 3 in Nucla *Montrose* on 22 Dec (CD, BW); 1 at Greenlee Preserve *Boulder* 29 Dec (TF et al.); 1 adult at Valmont Res. *Boulder* on 4 Feb (TF, SM et al.); 1 adult at Walden Ponds *Boulder* 21-25 Feb, likely the same individual as the Valmont bird (TF, SM, m.ob.); and 3 adults and 1 juvenile at Lathrop SP *Huerfano* on 26 Feb (PN).

Wood Duck: 4 at Lake Loveland *Larimer* on 26 Dec (SM).

American Black Duck: One report: 1 apparently pure adult male and 1 female Mallard hybrid at Jackson Res. *Morgan* on 19 Feb (SM, TS).

Mallard (“Mexican Duck”): One report: 1 male at Pueblo City Park *Pueblo* from 1 Jan to 29 Feb (SM, TS, BKP, m.ob.).

Cinnamon Teal: Early reports: 1 male in breeding plumage at Walden Ponds *Boulder* on 25 Feb (SM); 1 male at Holcim Wetlands *Fremont* also on 25 Feb (RM).

Tufted Duck: Potential fourth state record: 1 adult female at Firestone Gravel Pits *Weld* 4-6 Dec (SM, BS, m.ob.).

Greater Scaup: 12 reports of 25 individuals from counties *Adams* (2 birds), *Boulder* (2), *La Plata* (1), *Mesa* (3), *Morgan* (1), *Pueblo* (8), and *Weld* (8). High count: 6 at LUNA Res. *Weld* on 5 Feb (SM, TS).

White-winged Scoter: Two reports: 1 on the Denver CBC on 17 Dec; 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* from 17 Dec to 29 Jan (BKP).

Long-tailed Duck: All reports: 1 in Colorado Springs *El Paso* 11-19 Dec (RH, DC, m.ob.); 2 at Rifle Gap Res. *Garfield* on 23 Dec (AD); 2 females



Trumpeter Swan, Cattail Ponds, Larimer, 4 Jan 2012. Photo by Dan Brooke



Tundra Swan, Walden Ponds, Boulder, 16 Feb 2012. Photo by David Waltman



Long-tailed Duck, Tinseltown Pond, El Paso, 16 Dec 2012. Photo by Bill Maynard

and 1 male at Rawhide Power Plant *Larimer* on 26 Dec (SM); 1 at Denver City Park *Denver* continuing from the fall season through at least 3 Jan (LK, GW, KH, m.ob.); 1 female at Ruedi Res. *Eagle* on 11 Jan (SF); 1 at Brush Hollow Res. *Fremont* 18-20 Jan (SeM, BKP); 1 at Grand Junction Mesa 5-25 Feb (LA).

Barrow's Goldeneye: 7 reports of 130 individuals from 7 counties. First report: 3 on Arkansas River in Pueblo *Pueblo* on 17 Dec (DS). High count: 67 from Coryell Ranch Ponds *Garfield* on 22 Jan (DFi, AL, TM).

Hooded Merganser: Rare in the Yampa Valley during winter: 1 first-year male at Steamboat Springs *Routt* on 27 Jan (CDo).

Red-breasted Merganser: First report: 5 at Rawhide Power Plant on 26 Dec (SM). High count: 75 at Valmont Reservoir, 11 Dec (TF et al.).

Ruddy Duck: Unusual in winter: 10 at Rawhide Power Plant *Larimer* on 26 Dec (SM); 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 12 Jan (BKP); 1 at Valmont Reservoir *Boulder* 4 Feb (TF et al.); 2 at

Lake Henry *Crowley* 26 Feb (TF et al.).

Pacific Loon: One report: 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 17 Dec (BKP, DF).

Horned Grebe: Unusual in winter: 1 at Rifle Gap Res. *Garfield* on 10 Dec (TM); 22 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 1 Jan (SM, TS), 3-4 others 17-18 Feb (BKP, m.ob.); 12 at Valmont Res. *Boulder* on 4 Feb (TF et al.); 3 at Lake Henry *Crowley* on 26 Feb (TF et al.); 2 at Cherry Creek Res. *Arapahoe* on 28 Feb (GW).

Red-necked Grebe: One report: 1 apparent adult at Valmont Res. *Boulder* on 4 Feb (SM et al.).

Eared Grebe: Rare on WS in winter: 1 on the Steamboat Springs CBC *Routt* on 17 Dec (YVBC); 3 on the Durango CBC *La Plata* on 18 Dec (m.ob.).

Clark's Grebe: 1 at Union Res. *Weld* on 1 Dec (SM); 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* 14-17 Dec, and another 17-18 Feb (BKP, m.ob.).

Double-crested Cormorant: Unusual in winter: 1-4 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* 14-15 Dec (BKP); 5 at Valmont Res. *Boulder* from 15 Jan to 4 Feb (SM); 4 on the S Platte River at 74th Street in Brighton *Adams* on 26 Feb (SM, BS); 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 27 Feb (BKP).

American White Pelican: Late: 1 at John Martin Res. *Bent* on 10 Dec (DN).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Unusual in winter: 1 imm at Rock Canyon *Pueblo* on 6 Dec (BKP); 3 at Valmont Res. *Boulder* on 4 Feb (SM, TF, CN, TS, m.ob.).

Turkey Vulture: Very early re-

ports: 1 at Ridgway *Ouray* on 24 Feb (SH); 2 at Eagle *Eagle* on 25 Feb (JR).

Rough-legged Hawk: WS high count: 14 on Steamboat Springs CBC *Routt* on 17 Dec (YVBC).

Peregrine Falcon: All reports: 1 adult in Pueblo City Park *Pueblo* on 17 Dec (DS); 1 off of I-25 in Pueblo *Pueblo* on 9 Feb (BKP).

Sandhill Crane: 38 at Greenlee Preserve *Boulder* on 4 Dec (TF et al.); 4 adults on Lake Holbrook *Crowley* on 15 Dec (KMD, DM); 7 at Pathfinder Park *Fremont* on 23 Jan (RM).

Spotted Sandpiper: Rare in winter: 1 at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* 2-10 Dec (BKP); 1 on Arkansas River west of Runyon Lake *Pueblo* on 20 Dec (DS).

Greater Yellowlegs: Rare in winter: 2 at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* 2-7 Dec (BKP); 1 in Grand Junction Mesa on 25 Feb (LA).

Least Sandpiper: Rare in winter: 1 at Pleasure Park *Delta* from 6 Dec to 21 Jan (DG, m.ob.).

Little Gull: One report: 1 adult and 1 first-winter at Union Res. *Weld* on 1 Dec (SM, m.ob.).

Mew Gull: All reports: 1 adult at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 8 Dec (BKP, MJ); 1 adult at Lake Minnequa *Pueblo*



Rough-legged Hawk, Arapaho NWR, Jackson, 25 Feb 2012. Photo by Cree Bol

on 28 Dec (RM); 1 adult at Anthem Pond *Broomfield* on 9 Feb (GW); and 1 adult at Siena Pond *Broomfield* on 9 Feb (GW).

Thayer's Gull: 84 were reported from *Arapahoe* (1 bird), *Boulder* (17), *Broomfield* (25), *El Paso* (1), *Larimer* (10), *Morgan* (11), *Pueblo* (18), and *Weld* (1). High count: 11 adults and 1 imm at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 1 Jan (SM, TS).

Iceland Gull: All reports: 1 first-winter at Aurora Res. *Arapahoe* on 31 Dec (GW, JRo, JD); 1 juv at Siena Pond *Broomfield* on 14 Jan (SM); 1 adult at Anthem Pond *Broomfield* 27-28 Jan (IS, m.ob.); 1 second-winter at Jackson Res. *Morgan* on 19 Feb (SM, TS).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 36 were reported from *Arapahoe* (4 birds), *Boulder* (at least 6 birds), *Broomfield*

(4), Larimer (4), Morgan (3), and Pueblo (15).

Glaucous-winged Gull: One report: 1 imm at Aurora Res. *Arapahoe* on 31 Dec (SM, TS).

Glaucous Gull: 24 were reported from *Arapahoe* (3 birds), *Crowley* (1), *Bent* (1), *Boulder* (2), *Broomfield* (4), *Douglas/Jefferson* (1), *Larimer* (2), *Logan/Sedgwick* (1), *Morgan* (2), and *Pueblo* (7).

Great Black-backed Gull: All reports: 1-2 adults at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* from 4 Dec to 17 Feb (BKP, GW, RM); 1 adult at John Martin Res. *Bent* from 14 Dec to 31 Jan (fide DN, m.ob.); 1 adult at Jumbo Res. *Logan/Sedgwick* on 12 Feb (GW, SL, LK).

Gull hybrids: Herring Gull × Glaucous-winged Gull: 1 second-winter at Siena Pond *Broomfield* on 14 Jan (SM); a different second-cycle individual at Prince Lake No. 1 *Boulder* on 19 Feb (TF) seen again at Siena Pond *Broomfield* on 20 Feb (BS). Herring Gull × Glaucous Gull: 1 first-winter at Siena Pond *Broomfield*, 7 Jan – 20 Feb (SM, CN, BS, m.ob.). Herring Gull × Great Black-backed Gull: 1 at Pueblo Res. *Pueblo* on 9 Dec (BKP, JM, RoM).

Pomarine Jaeger: One report: 1 juv at Chatfield SP *Douglas/Jefferson* continuing from the fall period (19 Nov) through 1 Dec (GW, JK).

White-winged Dove: Unusual in winter north of Pueblo: 1 in Colorado Springs *El Paso* on 24 Dec (KC).

Greater Roadrunner:

First county record: 1 at Dinosaur Ridge *Jefferson* 9 Jan – end of season (JR, m.ob.). This bird was first seen by Dinosaur Ridge tour guides in Aug



Northern Goshawk, Crestview Estates, Boulder, 12 Feb 2012. Photo by David Waltman



Greater Roadrunner, Dinosaur Ridge, Jefferson, 20 Jan 2012. Photo by Mark Chavez



Black Phoebe, Arkansas River, Pueblo Reservoir State Park, Pueblo, 25 Jan 2012. Photo by Bill Maynard

2011; photographs of it on Facebook eventually alerted the birding community.

Western Screech-Owl: Unusual locations: 1 road-killed bird 14 miles south of Gateway Mesa on 17 Dec (BW, CD), where this species isn't known; 1 more road-killed bird at Slick Rock *San Miguel* on 1 Jan (BW, CD), a first county record; and 1 roosting in Pueblo *Pueblo* on 29 Jan (BKP, MY et al.)

Snowy Owl: All reports: 1 adult female at Aurora Res. *Arapahoe*, 18-28 Dec (CKe, GW, m.ob.); 1 at North Sterling Reservoir SP *Logan* on 20 Dec (TH, KMD, m.ob.); 1 at Jumbo Reservoir SWA *Logan/Sedgwick*, 20 Dec – 1 Jan (CSt, BK); 1 just east of Barr Lake SP *Adams* on 2 Jan (CH,

PP) was joined by another the following day (SR, GM, JW). One of these, an adult, was seen through at least 25 Jan; the other, an immature, was seen through 21 Feb. 1 adult on CR 12 1.3 miles north of State Highway 196 *Prowers* from 29 Jan to 31 Jan, when it was found dead (DL); 1 adult on CR SS 3.6 miles east of US 287 *Prowers* on 31 Jan (DL); 1 imm along *Weld* CR 49 north of CR 106, 13-14 Feb (DL, m.ob.); 1 along *Weld* CR 5 on 28 Feb (PS).

Short-eared Owl: 1 female north of Atwood *Logan* on 24 Dec (SM, TS).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: 1 at Two Buttes SWA *Baca* on 24 Feb (TF et al.).

Williamson's Sapsucker:

Rare in winter: 1 male at Red Canyon Park *Fremont* on 13 Jan (RM).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: All reports: 1 juv at Pueblo City Park *Pueblo* on 9 Dec (BKP); 1 juv in Lamar *Prowers* on 10 Dec (DL); 1 male at Red Rocks Elementary School *Jefferson* on 17 Dec (GW); 1 juv at Centennial Park in Cañon City *Fremont* from 18 Dec to 18 Feb (BKP, m.ob.); and 1 juv male and 1 juv female at Pueblo City Park *Pueblo* on 29 Feb (BKP, JS, PSS, CS).

Red-naped Sapsucker: Rare in winter: 1 female at Nucla *Montrose* on 20 Jan (CD, BW); 1 on Arkansas River in Pueblo *Pueblo* on 28 Jan (DC).

American Three-toed Woodpecker: Low elevation: 1 male on Section 16 of the Palmer Trail loop *El Paso* on 28 Dec (KC).

Black Phoebe: Rare in winter: 1 at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* 6-12 Dec (BKP); up to 3 in the Pueblo Nature Center Area *Pueblo* from 12 Dec to 25 Feb (BKP, BM, GW); 2 on the Colorado River near Fruita on 18 Dec (JC, m.ob.), furnishing a first winter record for the WS.

Say's Phoebe: Unusual in winter: 1 at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* 4-7 Dec (BKP, GW); 1 at Snakeskin Picnic Area *Pueblo* on 14 Dec (BKP); and 2 adults at John Martin Res. *Bent* 10-15 Dec (DN, m.ob.).

Gray Jay: Low elevation: 1 on Steamboat Springs CBC *Routt* on 17 Dec (YVBC).

Blue Jay: First county record: 1 at Lazear *Delta* from 31 Dec to 4 Jan (BH).

Chihuahuan Raven: Unusual location: 1 on Highway 67 north of Wetmore *Custer* on 18 Feb (BKP, JK, CW, JBa).

Pygmy Nuthatch: Unusual location: 2 in Pueblo City Park *Pueblo* on 15 Dec (BKP).

House Wren: Rare in winter: 1 at Rock Canyon in Pueblo *Pueblo* on 6 Dec (BKP).

Winter Wren: 1 in Boulder *Boulder* 9-15 Dec (ThH, m.ob.); 1 Pacific/Winter Wren at Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* on 12 Dec (BKP); 1 at Valco Bridge *Pueblo* on 5 Jan (DM); 1 at the Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* on 20 Feb (BKP); 1 in Left Hand Canyon *Boulder* on 24 Feb (ThH).

American Dipper: High count: 50 on Frying Pan River between Basalt and Ruedi Res. *Eagle* on 6 Feb (TM).

Eastern Bluebird: Second county record: 1 male in Nucla *Montrose* con-

tinued from fall season through 23 Dec (CD, m.ob.).

Hermit Thrush: Unusual in winter: 1 at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* on 2 Dec (BKP); 1 in Ouray *Ouray* on 17 Dec (KN); 1 on Durango CBC *La Plata* on 18 Dec (m.ob.); 1 at Fountain Library Park *El Paso* on 21 Dec (BKP); 1 in Steamboat Springs *Routt* on 22 Jan (TL); 1 between Pueblo Nature Center and Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* on 25 Jan (BKP, BMa, TL); 1 at Pathfinder Park *Fremont* on 10 Feb (RM); 1 at Jackson Res. *Morgan* on 19 Feb (SM); 1 near Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* on 20 Feb (BKP).

Varied Thrush: One report: 1 adult male at Durango Fish Hatchery *La Plata* from 31 Jan to 29 Feb (HM, RMo, m.ob.).

Northern Mockingbird: Rare in winter: 1 in Colorado City *Pueblo* from 27 Nov to 1 Jan (DS); 1 in Grand Junction *Mesa* on 15 Dec (BM); 1 in Eagle *Eagle* on 19 Dec (JF); 1 in Paoonia *Delta* on 8 Jan (JBn).

Brown Thrasher: Uncommon in winter: 1 at LCCW *Prowers* 24-25 Feb (TF et al.).

Chestnut-collared Longspur: Unusual in winter: 12-25 adults at John Martin Res. *Bent* 13-14 Dec (DN et al.); 1 near N Sterling Res. *Logan* on 24 Dec (SM, TS).

McCown's Longspur: Unusual in winter: 1 on CR SS *Prowers* on 24 Feb (TF et al.).

Snow Bunting: All reports: 1 at Frederick Recreational Area *Weld* on 4 Dec (SM); 1 at John Martin Res. *Bent* on 14 Dec (MPe); 1 at Chico Basin Ranch *Pueblo* on 6 Jan (BMa).

Common Yellowthroat: Rare in



White-throated Sparrow, Moose Visitor Center, Jackson, 25 Feb 2012. Photo by Cree Bol

winter: 1 female at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* on 2 Dec (BKP).

Pine Warbler: All reports: 1 adult male at a private residence in *Arapahoe* 7-28 Dec (BC, m.ob.); 1 at Denver West Office Park *Jefferson* on 8 Dec (JRo).

Wilson's Warbler: Rare in winter: 1 male at Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* on 2 Dec (BKP).

Green-tailed Towhee: Rare in winter: 1 at Jerry Creek Res. *Mesa* on 10 Dec (LA).

Rufous-crowned Sparrow: Rare in *Pueblo*: 1 was reported at Greenhorn Valley in Colorado City *Pueblo* on 29 Feb (DS). 1 near Higbee *Otero* on 26 Feb (TF et al.).

Field Sparrow: All reports: 2 at Bonny Res. *Yuma* 9-17 Dec (GW, LK); 1 at Frenchman Creek SWA *Phillips* on 24 Dec (SM); and 5 during

the John Martin Res. CBC *Bent* on 14 Dec (fide DN).

Lark Bunting: 1 at Two Buttes SWA *Prowers* on 24 Feb (TF et al.) was probably a locally wintering bird.

Sage Sparrow: Rare in winter: 1 in *Ouray Ouray* on 21 Dec (KN); and 1 in *Mack Mesa* on 25-29 Feb (LA).

Fox Sparrow: All reports: 1 "Red" at Glacier View Meadows *Larimer* on 18 Dec (CB); 1 "Red" at Red Rocks Park *Jefferson* on 4 Jan (RS); 1 "Slate-colored" in Grand Junction Mesa on 21 Jan (LA); 1 "Slate-colored" in Glenwood Springs *Garfield* on 26 Jan (TM); one "Red" near Boulder *Boulder* on 8 Feb (DW).

Lincoln's Sparrow: Unusual in winter: 2 around the Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* 12-15 Dec (BKP); 2 in Grand Junction Mesa on 18 Dec (AD); 1 along the South Platte River near Commerce City *Adams* on 30 Dec (TF et al.).



"Red" Fox Sparrow, *Crestview Estates*, Boulder, 8 Feb 2012. Photo by David Waltman

Swamp Sparrow: 12 individuals were reported this season from the counties *Boulder* (1 bird), *El Paso* (2), *Fremont* (1), *La Plata* (1), *Mesa* (1), *Morgan* (1), and *Pueblo* (5). The more unusual reports: 1 near Zink's Pond *La Plata* on 15 Jan (JB), and 1 in Lyons *Boulder* on 16 Feb (SM).

White-throated Sparrow: All reports: 1 "tan-striped" morph in Grand Junction *Mesa* from 15 Dec to 21 Jan (LA); 1 at the west end of the Cañon City Riverwalk *Fremont* on 18 Dec (BKP); 1 at the Fountain Creek Regional Park Nature Center *El Paso* 20-26 Dec (DC, m.ob.); 2 near the Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* on 19 Jan (BKP, BMa); 1 at the Moose Visitor Center *Jackson* on 8 Feb (RHo); and 2 west of the Pueblo Nature Center *Pueblo* 20-25 Feb (BKP).

Harris's Sparrow: 15 individuals were reported from *Boulder* (4), *Custer* (2), *Delta* (5), *El Paso* (1), *Montrose* (1), *Morgan* (1), and *Prowers* (1). WS and mountain reports: 1 in Nucla *Montrose* 3-5 Dec (CD, BW); 1 at Fruitgrowers Res. *Delta* 6-25 Dec (DaG); 1 in Delta *Delta* on 17 Dec (DG); 1 adult and 1 imm at Westcliffe *Custer* on 18 Dec (DS); 1 in Paonia *Delta* from 22 Dec to 24 Jan (JBn); and 2 in Hotchkiss *Delta* on 21 Jan (DFi, TM).

Harris's Sparrow × **White-crowned Sparrow:** 1 near the Valco Ponds SWA *Pueblo* on 17 Dec (BKP, DC).

White-crowned Sparrow: Dark-colored adults were at Greenlee Preserve *Boulder* 19-27 Feb (TF) and Lamar *Prowers* on 24 Feb (TF et al.). Given the locations and time of year, it



Golden-crowned Sparrow, Red Rocks Trading Post, Jefferson, 30 Jan 2012.
Photo by Cree Bol

is more likely that these individuals were of the nominate eastern subspecies (*leucophrys*) than of the interior western subspecies (*oriantha*).

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Two reports, both of birds present in previous winters and reported throughout this season: 1 adult at Red Rocks *Jefferson* (m.ob.) and 1 adult at Teller Farms *Boulder* (m.ob.).

Dark-eyed Junco: Gray-headed × Red-backed: 1 with this apparent parentage at Red Rocks Trading Post *Jefferson* on 25 Dec (SM).

Northern Cardinal: Rare away from far east: 1 male in Pueblo *Pueblo* 19 Jan – 25 Feb (BKP, BMa, m.ob.).

Lazuli Bunting: Rare in winter: 1 juv female at a private residence in Las Animas *Bent* on 14 Dec (DN, JD, SO et al.).

Rusty Blackbird: One report: 1-14



Pine Grosbeak, Moose Visitor Center, Jackson, 25 Feb 2012. Photo by Cree Bol

birds at Valco Ponds/Rock Canyon Pueblo from 2 Dec to 1 Jan (BKP, DN).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Rare in winter: 1 during the Rocky Ford CBC Otero on 15 Dec (fide SO); and 1 male on Olson Road near Vineland Pueblo on 20 Dec (DS).

Common Grackle: Rare in winter: 38 at the Denver Zoo Denver on 30 Dec (TF et al.); 2 at Jackson Res. Morgan on 8 Jan (SM, TS).

Great-tailed Grackle: Uncommon in winter: 3 during the Durango CBC La Plata on 18 Dec (m.ob.); 44 in Paoli Phillips on 24 Dec (SM, TS); 60 near Aurora Res. Arapahoe on 31 Dec (SM, TS); 103 at Stearns Lake Boulder on 14 Feb (TF).

Brown-headed Cowbird:

Uncommon in winter: 52 during the Montrose CBC Montrose on 17 Dec; 3 at Union Res. Weld on 31 Dec (SM, TS); 1 at Lower Latham Res. Weld on 19 Feb (SM); 1 at Union Res. Weld on 26 Feb (SM, BS); and 75 in Fruita Mesa throughout the season provided a record number for winter (LA).

Bullock's Oriole: 1 adult male in Fort Collins Larimer on 2 Jan (SB).

Black Rosy-Finch: High count: 38 birds in Maher Montrose on 7 Jan (JC).

Purple Finch: One report: 1 female at Bonny Res. Yuma 9-17 Dec (GW, LK).

Common Redpoll: All reports: 1 in Colorado Springs El Paso on 3 Dec (DP); 1 in Colorado Springs El Paso 5-7 Dec (CP, KP, m. ob); 35 near Granby Grand on 17 Dec (MB); 1 in Eagle Eagle on 24 Dec (JF); and 7 north of Atwood Logan on 24 Dec (SM).

Red Crossbill: 3 flyovers at Rouse Park, Cañon City Fremont on 18 Dec (BKP, CK); 1 Type 5 at Timpas SWA Otero on 28 Jan (SO), possibly the first report of this type so far from the mountains.

Lesser Goldfinch: Uncommon in winter: 1 in Colorado Springs El Paso on 7 Feb (KC); 1 in Boulder Boulder on 21 Feb (HF, TF).

Evening Grosbeak: High count: 317 birds during the Steamboat Springs CBC Routt on 17 Dec (YVBC).

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A Huge Concentration of Cassin's Finches

Jeff Jones

On Sunday, 11 March 2012, I stopped at a location where I did an RMBO transect several years back: Browns Creek, Chaffee County, off U.S. Highway 285 at County Road 270. I took the road back to the foothills east of Mount Antero. The temperature was about 41 degrees Fahrenheit and the sky overcast, without much breeze. I got out of my car near where the side road to Browns Creek is gated off for the season and heard a cacophony of singing finches.

I am used to this racket to a certain degree at my home in Teller County – usually from a combination of House and Cassin's Finches along with Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks. The level of noise in this open Ponderosa Pine woodland, at about 9,000 feet of elevation, was incredible. It was coming from about a quarter mile away. I trudged across the snow to the edge of the noise in this open woodland and found Cassin's Finches everywhere, singing. My home lot is exactly an acre, so I have a good estimate of the size of an acre. For at least five acres there were dozens of Cassin's Finches per tree, all singing. I expected to find Pine Siskins as well as perhaps other species, but all I could find were Cassin's Finches exclusively.

The ponderosas in this stand were of a homogeneous young age, perhaps 25–45 feet tall. I attempted to estimate the number of finches by counting the birds in several trees and then counting trees. Each tree contained a minimum of a dozen birds. In some trees, I could count upwards of 40 birds. Then I counted 25 trees in the half-acre immediately in front of me. With an estimated average of 20 finches per tree, I figured I had 400–600 Cassin's Finches just in the 25 trees in front of me. Extrapolating the figure across five acres put the estimated number of deafening singing Cassin's Finches at 4,000–6,000.

There was not much movement among the birds, such as chasing each other around within or amongst the trees; instead, most were simply singing. When my dog and I approached the edge of the flock too closely, those in the closest tree moved to a nearby tree and continued their singing without complaints from the original residents of the new tree. Instead of walking into the heart of the concentration, I moved left and right along the flock boundary in order to come up with my assessment that it covered five acres.

There appeared to be an even mix of male- and female-plumaged individuals. I did not note if any of the female-plumaged individuals

were singing; I assumed that many were younger males that had yet to achieve their raspberry coloration.

I had never seen or heard anything like this from Cassin's Finches. I am quite familiar with this species, as I have lived in their breeding habitat in Teller County for 24 years now. While I do get them congregating in my woods near my feeder, at times numbering 40–50, I had never seen a flock of 4,000–6,000. The noise was such that a person would not have been able to hear someone else talking at a normal level from 20 feet away.

I left after about 20 minutes, wishing I could stay and listen for hours. And they were still going at it. They had not moved.

This flock is likely one of the largest ever documented, but it is not unprecedented. The *Birds of North America* account for this species (Hahn 1996) says that Cassin's Finches gather in "large flocks," and mentions a congregation of "up to 5,000" in December in Colorado. However, congregations of this size seem unusual, and worthy of documentation.

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FIELD NOTE

Adult Male Northern Flicker Kills Adult Male Northern Flicker

Dave Leatherman

At about 8:30 A.M. on 25 March 2012, I was driving west on Mulberry Street in Fort Collins, Larimer County, Colorado. It was a warm spring morning with temperatures already in the upper 50s Fahrenheit. As I passed Sheldon Lake at City Park, I noticed two Northern Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*) struggling together on the pavement in an automobile parking area. Turning around, I parked head-on to the situation within the parking area at a distance of about 15 meters, stayed in my car, and just watched.

It was apparent very quickly that this was not courtship or gentle rivalry. Both birds were adult males of the "red-shafted" subspecies. By

the onset of observation, one clearly had the better of the bout. This bird had one foot embedded in the upper back feathers of the other, with its second foot out of view on the ground. As the aggressor held down the lower individual, it pecked steadily and repeatedly at the back of the disadvantaged bird's head. About every 30 seconds, the pecking bird rested, while the bird being pecked panted and/or screamed. The only other times I have heard this same scream are when flickers are being pursued or captured by accipiters.



The victim of fatal agonistic behavior between two Northern Flickers at City Park in Fort Collins, Larimer County, 25 March 2012. Photo by Dave Leatherman

At about 8:40 A.M., as the aggressor was pecking relentlessly, a recreational walker came past the scene, scaring it off. Once released, the other bird did not move; it appeared to be dead. Both the walking man and I stared at the lifeless flicker, trying to comprehend what we had just seen. He walked on, staring back at the carcass once, and I took the accompanying photo (Fig. 1). The feathers of the dead bird were somewhat ruffled but showed no blood. Apparently the cause of death was blunt trauma injury.

The *Birds of North America* account for Northern Flicker (Moore and Wiebe 2008) states that most agonistic behavior in flickers involves defense of nest territories and/or mates, as opposed to food resources. Agonistic behavior among flickers of the same sex is usually carried out within the ritualized “fencing duels” often referred to as the “Wicka Dance,” in which the combatants utilize their bills as foils. While this behavior may go on for hours, it usually does not involve physical contact.

All manner of flicker territorial behavior was in evidence in Fort Collins for the few weeks preceding my observations, somewhat earlier than in recent years. My suspicion in this case is that the interactions of these two birds started out as a Wicka Dance and ended up in extreme, or at least rarely witnessed, fashion.

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European Elm Flea Weevil

Dave Leatherman

It must have happened one night in 2005. Elm Leaf Beetles, living in this country on an English passport issued sometime in the 1800's, essentially disappeared – pushed out by their distant relatives the European Elm Flea Weevils. It happened in the courtyard of my Fort Collins apartment complex as well as all over Colorado and several other states west of the Mississippi. Of course, the changing of the beetle guard on elm leaves was not really instant, but it was rapid. So quick, in fact, that many Colorado tree people, including me, did not even notice until the switch was almost complete. But hungry birds, necessarily very observant of their world, noticed and continue to notice.

First, a little bit about the Elm Leaf Beetle (ELB, *Xanthogaleruca luteola*). Although it was probably introduced multiple times along the East Coast in the 1800's, it was first formally reported causing issues for North American elms in Baltimore, Maryland (Drooz 1985). Probably reaching Colorado early in the 1900s, this member of the leaf beetle family (Chrysomelidae) soon became the default insect chewing the leaves of all elm (*Ulmus*) species, particularly our beloved American Elm (*U. americana*) in cities, as well as Siberian Elm (*U. pumila*) in rural towns and windbreaks.

Both the dull yellow adult beetles and the darkish yellow-and-black larvae feed on elm leaves. Adults chew “shotholes” in the leaves, while the immature stages graze the surface, leaving behind a network of veins in a manner of feeding referred to as “skeletonizing.” ELB has two generations during mild years in Colorado, and by the end of summer, heavily infested trees generally look brown, like toast done on a setting of 5 when 4 would have been optimal.

Like most defoliators of deciduous trees, ELB causes mostly aesthetic damage and is rarely lethal to its hosts, unless additional factors intervene like drought, exposure to herbicides, and the like. Elm deaths, while often mistakenly attributed to ELB, are usually due to a quite deadly wilt called Dutch Elm Disease. No doubt part of the confusion stems from this disease being vectored by tiny bark beetles. A beetle's a beetle to most tree owners/lovers.

After feeding and immature development is complete, ELB larvae have the interesting habit of crawling down the trunk en masse to pupate and transform into adults – a habit that is particularly relevant to hungry birds. Adult ELBs overwinter in protected places, usually outdoor micro-sites like debris piles, but also occasionally human habi-

tations. When they enter human abodes in large numbers around the time of the first autumn frost, their status as “pest” is compounded and greatly solidified.

Although they were no doubt eaten by many bird species throughout the warm months, ELB did not appear to be prime bird fare during their reign in Colorado. I generally only noticed heavy feeding on them in late summer and fall, when their populations were high and conspicu-

ous, and other insects were on the wane. In September, in the Siberian Elm grove at Crow Valley Campground north of the main picnic shelter and tables, the show was often noteworthy. Downy Woodpeckers inched along limbs and trunks taking delight in easy prey that did not require extraction from under bark. Western Tanagers, early-arriving Townsend’s Solitaires, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Chipping Sparrows, Plumbeous Vireos, and even relative rarities like a Blackpoll Warbler did well on plump larvae marching down trunks for the ground.

Times change, and perhaps such scenes will be relicts of history, like concentrations of Chihuahuan Ravens at buffalo slaughters on the Great Plains in the 1860s and 1870s (Aiken and Warren 1914). But worry not, oh hungry birds – there’s a new entrée in town.

European Elm Flea Weevil (*Orchestes alni*) was first reported in North America in the Northeast in 1982. It had reached the Upper Midwest by 2003 (Drooz 1985). The first specimens in the collection at Colorado State University are from my Fort Collins courtyard on 4 July 2006. I was motivated to check the gangly elm looming over my front door by an earlier 2006 report on the Colorado listserv for plant people (called “PestServ,” pestserv-l@yuma.acns.colostate.edu), managed by my friend and colleague at CSU, Dr. Whitney Cranshaw. Now, essentially every Siberian Elm I have looked at on the eastern plains of Colorado and western Nebraska has this insect in spades. I have not seen an Elm Leaf Beetle anywhere in Colo-



Fig. 1. *European Elm Flea Weevil larval mine in the tip of an American Elm leaf. Note the nearly fully-grown, banana-shaped larva visible at the lower left edge of the brown leaf mine (dark mandibles pointed downward)*. Photo by Dave Leatherman



Fig. 2. Siberian Elm leaf showing European Elm Flea Weevil larval mining, beak mark due to bird predation on the larva ("V" of missing foliage at the leaf tip), and feeding holes made by adult weevils later in the summer. Photo by Dave Leatherman

rado in the last two years except for a stretch of the Arkansas River centered on Rocky Ford.

Like ELB, European Elm Flea Weevil (EFW) also feeds on elm leaves as both larvae and adults, but rather than skeletonizing leaves, the larvae feed as leafminers, tunneling between the upper and lower surfaces of the leaf along its edge (Fig. 1). Leafmining is one of the many strategies that defoliating insects have evolved to help them avoid predation. Leafmining protects the larva by hiding it from view inside the leaf, where, if detected, it requires specialized extraction.

Two things appear to be allowing birds to solve the puzzle of EFW. First, the mined area becomes increasingly brown on an otherwise light green leaf as feeding progresses. Foraging birds appear to key in on such defects or differences in leaves,

allowing them to detect the cause of the anomaly. Second, the leaves are relatively fresh and soft when the morsel doing the feeding is present. The tenderness of the foliage allows birds to just punch out the entire mined area with one snap of the beak and a tug or two. Damaged leaf portion and insect are usually swallowed as one package.

The EFW overwinters as a small (3–4 mm) weevil on the ground in leaf litter near elms. The name "flea weevil" accrues from their hop (actually a powerful leg-jettisoned flight into the air), which makes them instantly disappear to the human eye. (See a photo of an adult weevil online at <http://bit.ly/N05eCx>). Shortly after the emergence of new elm leaves, usually in April, the adults fly up to feed, causing a small number of "shotholes" in the leaves. After mating, female weevils insert eggs into the interior of leaves, usually near large veins, usually just one egg (or a very few) per leaf.

Shortly, the young larvae begin their meandering feeding trail between the upper and lower layers of the leaf, forming ever-widening "mines" that terminate at the leaf margins, usually near the leaf tips.

These tunneled areas are tan to dark brown, depending on the concentration of fecal pellets visible through the narrow, mostly transparent leaf epidermis. Larvae pupate within a small cocoon inside the mines, emerging as free-living, jump-happy adults in early summer. Adults spend the rest of their free-spirit summer feeding on leaves with the chewing mandibles at the tips of their long snouts. This summer feeding can end up riddling affected foliage with holes (Figs. 2-3), and rivals ELB in terms of total impact on both tree vigor and tree appearance.

Colorado's birds are quickly figuring out the new item on the menu. It appears to me that birds are mostly exploiting this resource two ways: first, by biting the mined portion of young leaves and swallowing the leaf and weevil larva/pupa inside, and, second, by eating adult weevils wherever they are found (on leaves, walls, sidewalks, etc.) from April through October.

In my limited experience, the champion mine-biter appears to be Black-headed Grosbeak. On 18 May 2011, during scouting for a CFO Convention trip at an unnamed public bike trail in Fruita, Mesa County, I observed at least ten individual grosbeaks gorging on larval flea weevils. Similar spectacles have occurred in May at Last Chance (Washington County), Chico Basin Ranch (El Paso/Pueblo Counties), and most recently in the Trinidad area (Las Animas County) at this year's CFO Convention. It seems safe to say that bird feeding on mining weevils is a statewide occurrence wherever elms grow, and that many passerine bird species besides Black-headed Grosbeaks participate.

Other species observed over the last two years eating weevil larvae in elm leaf mines in May in Colorado include Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, Chipping Sparrow, Western Kingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Worm-eating Warbler (Dave Ely, 14 May 2012, Chico Basin Ranch), Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole, and House Sparrow. Seeing the kingbird feeding in this manner was surprising to me; it appeared to be a copycat type of activity, as if the kingbird was observing other birds feeding this way and thinking "there must be something to it". I also think Brewer's Sparrows were feeding on larvae in mines in



Fig. 3. Siberian Elm leaf in late summer at Grandview Cemetery showing the result of heavy European Elm Flea Weevil adult feeding. Note that this leaf did not have any mining by larval weevils. Photo by Dave Leatherman

my yard on 22 May 2011, but I cannot rule out the possibility that they were eating a concurrently available prey, adult elm leafminer sawfly (*Kaliofenusa ulmi*).

The list of species eating adult weevils is probably very long, but eating adults is probably more of a casual, opportunistic event than a premeditated one, due to the unpredictable occurrence of this life stage, particularly in congregations that would make it worth the effort to feed on such a small tidbit. Nevertheless, I have seen Chipping Sparrows, House Sparrows, Common Grackles, and American Robins feeding in a manner consistent with catching hyperactive prey like adult weevils. More careful observation is needed to fill out our knowledge of this activity.

There is a lot more to be learned about birds and their exploitation of European Elm Flea Weevils. Perhaps you can contribute to our knowledge. First, learn to recognize elms, then the characteristic leaf mines as they appear in late spring or early summer. To confirm the presence of a larva, hold a mined leaf up to the sun and look for the larval silhouette at the fat end of the mine near the leaf edge (see Fig. 1). If still not convinced, carefully peel off a layer of leaf surface from over the mined portion. After mangling several, you will finally achieve the separation of layers necessary to see the insect (and appreciate why birds just eat the meat and salad at the same time). The weevil larva will be very tiny, pale yellow, and roughly the proportions of an average corncob. Find a tree that is full of such leaves, stand back, and hopefully follow the activities of birds snapping and tugging at the leaves. Take notes, and share your findings, please.

Although predation on adults would be much more difficult to confirm, information on this would almost all be new, as well. Thank you.

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Fig. 7: Second-cycle Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Elwha River Mouth, Washington, 28 October 2011. Photos by Steven G. Mlodinow



Fig. 8: Adult Herring × Glaucous-winged Gull, Elwha River Mouth, Washington, 28 October 2011.



Fig. 9: First-cycle Thayer's Gull, Everett, Washington, 20 December 2010.

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