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September 13, 1992

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CO Field Ornithologists Official Records Committee
c/o Zoological Collections
Denver Museum of Natural History
City Park
Denver, CO 80205

Ref: Mourning warbler *Oporornis philadelphia*

Dear CFO Official Records Committee,

I lack the official reporting forms for rare bird observations in Colorado, but I am aware of what information you would like and I also have a used Sight Record Form from the Latilong Study to follow.

Species: Mourning warbler *Oporornis philadelphia*

Date: 11 September 92

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: Male Plumage: Adult

Latilong: Appears to be 11

Locality: Wheat Ridge Greenbelt near Prospect Park, dirt trail northeast of stable (I am fairly new to the Denver area and I am uncertain of the precise landmarks).

Nearest town: Wheat Ridge, CO

Time observed: Approximately 0846 hours

Duration of observation: For an *oporornis* species it seemed a long time, but was about a minute and a half.

Other observers with me: None

Other observers independently: Unknown

Light conditions: Morning sunlight coming from the east, but bird was in shadow of shrubs and I was on the north side of the bird at right angle to the sun.

Optics: 7X35 Leitz

Distance and how measured: Minimum focusing distance (approx 15 feet), I had to back up a half step to bring it into sharp focus.

Photographs: None

Bird's behavior: Bird was foraging on low shrub branches about grass height. It was in the company of a lone house wren and both were silent throughout duration of observation. The only other birds in the vicinity were Brewer's blackbirds and two northern flickers, but not in association. I thought the area was exceptionally quiet given the great habitat and dense foliage. I was stopping to look and listen about every 50 feet along the dirt path while looking for birds when I noticed movement on a dead, bare branch just over the top of the grasses/weeds. It took about 5-7 seconds before I could get a good look and identify the house wren and it was an additional 10-15 seconds before I saw the second bird moving deep in the shadows. I thought it would be another house wren until it followed one of a half dozen dead and bare branches out of the deep shadows.

Description: I immediately noticed its movement and posture were not like the wren, it was slightly larger, and I saw yellow as it moved into more light. My first thought was Wilson's warbler because I had just observed several near the tree bridge, but I immediately noticed a dark hood extending down to the breast. Within a second or two it was in better light (not direct sunlight) and I could easily discern black at the base of the charcoal gray hood across the breast and the black going up to near the base of the lower mandible. Having lived the past decade with MacGillivray's nesting in my backyard, I made the instantaneous assumption it was that species, but then I noticed the complete lack of white crescents around the eye. I was able to see a completely black eye, absence of any white around the eye; thin warbler bill; olive/brownish (the lighting gave it a more brownish coloration) colored back, wings and tail; yellow belly, flanks, and undertail coverts. Bill was dark and legs were light or "cream" colored.

Song or call: None heard from either species

Habitat: Small stream to the south of the birds, riparian vegetation of cottonwoods, box elder, variety of shrub species, poison ivy, virginia creeper, grasses, etc.

Elimination of similar species: The similarity of three of the *opornis* species makes fall identification difficult with all but the adult male. The major difference with MacGillivray's is it has two white crescents (above and below the eye). Connecticut should have a continuous white eyering, although sometimes broken. Connecticut lacks black "bib". I did not

observe this bird on the ground, so could not tell if it hopped, as opposed to the Connecticut's walk.

Prior experience: In the past ten years I have probably seen a hundred MacGillivray's in different locations throughout the west, but mostly in Yellowstone National Park. I have never observed a Connecticut. I have observed approximately a half dozen mourning warblers at Point Pelee, Michigan, Cape May, and Minnesota.

Consultations: I thought this species was a rare occurrence, but not as rare as it turned out to be. After returning home I consulted the 1987 edition of Colorado Bird Distribution, Latilong Study and Colorado Birds by Andrews and Righter to discover this bird was much more rare than I thought.

This report was written after the observation from memory on September 12, 1992.

William Schreier

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