

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPTED

MOURNING WARBLER

Oporornis philadelphiaLocation: Grove at the northwest edge of Lake Henry; Ordway; Crowley County, ColoradoDate: September 5, 1993Setting:

I was birding alone about 8:30 a.m. on Sunday in the grove on the north side of Lake Henry. There was not much action and I wandered down off of the raised road and approached a scrubby area of tamarisk. There were a few Wilson's Warblers in the tamarisk and I began to "pish" to draw these birds out. Approximately 20 or so Wilson's Warblers and a couple of Orange-crowns came towards me through the brush. I stood still, in the open about 15 feet from the edge of the tamarisk and worked through these birds. A slightly larger bird came out of the tamarisk and flew to a bare twig about 15 feet high just beside me. I got my binoculars on the bird just as it flew back into the tamarisk but guessed that it was a MacGillivray's Warbler from the size and general color. I "pished" again and the bird flew back towards me and perched uneasily on feathery tamarisk boughs at the outer edge of trees about 20 feet away. The bird perched at an angle on nearly vertical branches and turned this way and that, which afforded me views of the bird from the side and repeated views of the bird from in front and underneath. At one point it perched sideways on a twig and turned its entire undersides towards me, allowing a great view of the bird from chin to under tail. It perched variously this way for about a minute, or a little less, at a height of about 8 feet. It then flitted back into the heavy tamarisk and I was never able to lure it out again, nor did I glimpse it again. I felt that it was an immature female Mourning Warbler while I watched it but I was not positive of what the definitive field marks were. I wrote down my notes on the spot and consulted my National Geographic guide later in the car, but this was not much help. At home that day I consulted the October 1990 issue of Birding and was able to verify the identification.

Description:

The bird was small, but slightly larger and heavier-bodied than the Orange-crowned and much larger, and proportionately shorter-tailed, than the Wilson's Warblers. I knew that it was an Oporornis sp. by the plain olive upperparts, lack of wingbars and bright pink legs. The bird had an olive-gray crown and had a distinct gray cast to the face. I first noticed a thin, distinctive eye ring. It was clear and crisp and quite narrow. The color of the eye ring was off-white, not bright white. At first glance I thought that the eye ring was complete, but as I repeatedly observed the face I noticed that it was narrowly broken in front by a tiny gap and had a suggestion of a break at the back. The undersides were nearly all bright yellow. There was a clear yellow chin and throat that was continuous down the center and merged without break with the yellow of the breast, belly and undertail coverts. The only thing suggesting the bib were grayish sides to the breast that did not even come close to meeting in the center. The undertail coverts extended well out, more than halfway to the end, when gauged against the under surface of the tail. I did not note any features of the bill. The eye was black.

Similar Species:

This is a difficult I.D. Luckily, this bird seems to have been a typical imm. female Mourning Warbler with a bright yellow throat merging with the bright yellow underparts (usually white or buffy and separated from the yellow belly in other Oporornis) and a typical thin, nearly complete, off-white eye ring. Features mentioned above should rule out non-Oporornis, and Common Yellowthroat has tan, brownish or white shades underneath that were lacking in this bird. Connecticut Warbler would have a more striking, full eye ring, a buffy throat, a suggestion of a complete bib and be less pure yellow below. Immature and female MacGillivray's Warblers have a thicker, whiter and more two-part eye ring. The MacGillivray's nearly always have a white or gray throat and even when this is yellowish, this color is separated from the yellow of the breast by a complete bib. The MacGillivray's undersides are usually washed with olive.

Experience with Species:

I have seen all Oporornis sp. in Colorado and/or elsewhere in the U.S. The most recent Mourning Warblers that I have observed were 9 during 1979 in northern Illinois.

This report is prepared from notes made during and after observation.

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