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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Report of Unusual Record

Species: GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (Catharus minimus)

Date: 24 May 1984

Location: Below Two Buttes Res., Two Buttes, Baca Co., CO

Time: Approx. 9:00 a.m. Observed for approx. one minute.

Other observers: Laurens Halsey; but did not see it as well.

Observation conditions: Seen in partial shade; general light was bright; sun to my back. Wind was calm. Optical equipment: Bausch & Lomb zoom 60X set at 25X scope, tripodded; at approx 10 meters.

Behavior: Typical catharus, moving and feeding low in sapling cottonwoods near water. Direct, short flights. Perched at a more or less level attitude, tail not cocked.

Plumage: First saw that it was a greenish-backed thrush. Smooth, grayish olive from crown to end of tail, including wings; no color variances; entire upper parts uniform. Face was grayish; no discernible eyering around dark eye. Throat was whitish and clear set off by two faint malar stripes. The upper breast was moderately spotted with triangular black spots on a grayish-white field. Spots were linear in distribution, not random, ending on the lower breast. Belly was white. Flanks were gray washed.

Similar species: Hermit Thrush (Catharus guttatus) was immediately eliminated by lack of contrast between back and tail color. Also Hermit Thrush usually shows some sort of eyering and less distinct breast spotting. Veery (Catharus fuscascens) usually shows uniform rusty upperparts but I understand there are races with uniform olive upperparts. These "green" Veerys have indistinct spotting on a buffy field rather than a gray field on the breast. Swainson's Thrush (Catharus ustulatus) presents more of a problem. We initially suspected this bird to be a Swainson's but investigated further because the back color seemed unusual (grayish olive rather than brownish olive). After seeing the face and underparts I realized it was a Gray-cheeked because its face was gray, not buff; it showed no eyering and the spotting on the breast was triangular, not rounded, on the grayish rather than a buffy field; breast spotting in Swainson's would not be as extensive or as sharply defined.

References: After observation consulted Peterson.

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