

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

44-94-49
Accepted

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH

Catharus minimus

Location: Grove at the northwest edge of Lake Henry; Ordway, Crowley County, Colorado

Date: May 14, 1994

Setting:

I was birding the migrant grove on the northwest point of Lake Henry following torrential rains. I ran into a pretty good movement of Catharus thrushes early in the afternoon. There were about 30-40 individuals overall. There was one Hermit Thrush, two beautiful Veeries and the rest Swainson's Thrushes. All fed quietly in the soaked, bug-infested litter beneath the recently flooded tamarisks alongside the access road. I spent about an hour and a half, sitting and walking slowly, quietly watching the thrushes as they fed and moved in and out of the shadows. There was a constant background of Swainson's Thrush's gentle "whit" call notes. I saw the Gray-cheeked Thrush just before I spotted the second Veery. Both were in a group of about 12 Catharus sp. I quietly watched the Gray-cheeked from about 2:00 p.m. to 2:20 p.m. as it hopped along in the dappled sunlight. I saw it clearly as it moved about under the tamarisks. A couple of times it stood very still on the leaf litter, sometimes in full sun. This gave me excellent views of it, from the front, sides and rear. I observed the bird from as close as 25 feet with B & L 10 x 40 binoculars.

Description:

The bird was an adult Catharus thrush (about 7" long, plain above, no wing bars, spotted breast, short tail, and stout, straight bill). Overall the bird was one color above, including the wings, from head to tail. The color of the upperparts was a grayish-brown, marginally greyer and colder looking than the Swainson's Thrush. Unlike Hermit Thrushes, this bird's tail and rump were clearly not redder, nor browner than the rest of the upperparts. The face was very plain, flat grey, showing no contrast with the rest of the head and upperparts. There was neither an eyering nor any suggestion of paler lores, but there was a very faint hint of a paler eyeline. The undersides were whitish with distinct, dark grey spots, more distinctly spotted than Swainson's Thrush. I did not observe any buffy tones to the sides of the breast.

Similar Species:

Thrashers have much longer tails, curved bills. Wood Thrush is larger, richer brown with a distinct eyering and large distinct spots on the breast. The Veery, which was present, is a richer brown, has a lighter face, contrasting with the crown, and has very pale, indistinct spotting on the breast. Swainson's Thrush has a buffy face and an eyering, warmer upperparts. Hermit Thrush has an eyering, a contrasting reddish rump and tail, and flicks its wings.

Experience with Species:

I have seen all the Catharus thrushes in Colorado, including three Gray-cheeked Thrushes in May. I have also seen Gray-cheeked Thrushes in spring migration in Texas.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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