

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

ACCEPT 7-0

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH

Catharus minimusLocation: Willow Creek; Lamar, Prowers County, ColoradoDate: May 9, 1995Setting:

Willow Creek is a narrow riparian woodland along a small drainage on the south edge of Lamar. I was birding alone in the afternoon. Conditions were very good, with diffuse direct sun. I spotted the Gray-cheeked Thrush at the northern edge of the area and chased the bird from perch to perch for about 20 minutes. It was a typical Catharus thrush, being rather small, brownish and shy. I was able to get great views though by walking and moving very slowly and not pursuing the bird too aggressively. I think it helps that I was alone. After following the bird for about ten minutes I re-discovered it perched quietly in the lower part of a Russian olive tree. I watched it at a distance of about 50 feet with my B & L 10x40 binoculars. The light was excellent.

Description:

The bird was a small thrush, about 7" long – smaller and more slender than an American Robin. It perched still, without wing or tail flicking, and held its body in a horizontal posture. The uppersides were an even gray color with a slight brownish wash. The rump and tail were the same color as the back and wings. There were no wingbars. The color of the uppersides lacked the warm buffy or reddish tones of the Veery or Hermit Thrush. The face was the same color as the rest of the upperparts – brownish-gray. There was no apparent eyering and the lores, cheek and lower face lacked any buff tones. The undersides were white. The breast was rather heavily and finely spotted with small brownish-gray spots. The breast and flanks showed a dull gray wash. The bill was medium-sized, not too sharp and dark in color. The eye was dark and the legs were dull flesh color. The bird was silent.

Similar Species:

All the other Catharus thrushes are very similar. Hermit Thrush shows a strong eyering, is browner above and has a reddish rump and tail. Veery is much richer reddish-brown above (eastern race) and is very faintly spotted with a buffy wash on the breast (all races). Swainson's Thrush has a buffy eyering, lores and cheek, is less heavily spotted below, and has a brownish wash on the breast and flanks. This bird's combination of gray face, heavy breast spotting, evenly colored cold gray upperparts and gray flanks eliminate the other species.

Experience with Species:

I have seen all species of Catharus thrushes in Colorado and elsewhere. I have the most experience with Hermit and Swainson's, less with Veery and the least with Gray-cheeked.

This report was prepared from memory.

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