

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSHCatharus minimus

Location: About 2 miles northeast of Ft. Lyons Wildlife Easement; east of Las Animas; Bent County, Colorado

Date: May 18, 1995

Setting:

I found this bird while birding alone one afternoon in a small tree lot about two miles northeast of Ft. Lyons Wildlife Easement. This is a patch of cottonwoods, elm and tamarisk on the site of an old farm. It forms an oasis in an otherwise barren prairie and seems to attract vagrants (e.g. Summer Tanager, Chestnut-sided, Black-and-White and Black-throated Gray warblers). I saw this thrush as it flew through an open area and landed on a bare branch about 6 feet high, just under the canopy of one of the elms. I watched it for several minutes with my binoculars. Then I went to my car and got my Kowa TSN4 20-60x scope. I set it up and watched this individual in my scope at about 50 feet distance. I watched the bird in good sun for about 10-15 minutes. It was the best view that I have ever had of a Gray-cheeked Thrush. The image almost filled my field of view at 60 power.

Description:

The bird was a Catharus thrush, medium-sized, brownish, smaller and slimmer than a robin. It perched in one spot quietly for the whole observation period and I did not try to approach it or scare it. It did not flick its wings or tail like a Hermit Thrush. The bird was dark above and whitish below. Above it was all one color – a cold grayish-brown. There were no wingbars. It lacked the brownish-red tones on wing and tail of the Hermit Thrush. The face was flat gray, the same color as the head and back. The bird lacked an eyering and had no pattern on the face at all. The undersides of the bird were white with abundant, small gray spots across the breast. The background of the breast and the flanks were washed with gray. The bill was medium-small, rather blunt and dark. The eye was dark. The legs were pinkish. 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.

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

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