

2005-071

SUPPLEMENT II TO TROPICAL PARULA REPORT
DAVID LEATHERMAN
WRITTEN 4JULY2005

This report includes a few descriptive details and behavioral observations that revise, or add to, those included in my previous report.

The bird began singing today (4July2005) about 8:30 am, after not being detected (to my knowledge) since 3:40pm on 1July2005. While a pattern is tough to discern with this bird, it does seem that it is not detectible at Grandview Cemetery for increasingly longer periods of time. That is, it does not predictably sing in the early morning each day, as it did with relative regularity during the early part of its appearance (beginning 18June). It was heard at mid-day on 19June and seen and heard at mid-day thru early afternoon on 20June (Joe and Steve Mammoser). It was first heard at 6:45am but was not detected after about 7:30am on 21June; not in early morning on 22June but began at about 8:30am; was seen and heard 23,24,25,26,27,28,29June (although I was not present all these days, I believe its record was continuous during this stretch); not seen or heard on 30June; then on 1July not singing at 7 but began about 7:35 thru 3:40pm; not present 2 & 3July despite intense scrutiny.

Today I got good looks at the leg color and would amend my previous report to say they are dull yellowish (decidedly not as bright as the lower mandible-throat-upper breast area), not "dark" as previously described. The tail is light gray underneath and somewhat forked. Whitish tail spots show on the outer retrices and I think smaller ones exist on the next one or two retrices in from the outermost ones, but this was not clear. The front wingbar usually shows a little more prominently than the rear one.

On July 4, the bird sang its entire repertoire of songs, including variations of the upward-spiraling secondary song at great lengths off and on thru the morning. Also, for the first time in my experience, it gave its call or "chip" note for short periods of time, twice during the period between 8:30am and 12:04pm. The note was a crisp, "tsip!", as best such a note can be described and not unlike what you typically hear yellow warblers give.

I watched it perch on one foot and rest or preen for a period of about 15 minutes within the interior of a honeylocust southeast of its primary tree (also a honeylocust just west of a prominent headstone ("Thomas Quinn") in the northwest corner of Section 8).

Trees utilized for foraging during the morning hours of 4July were (in descending order of time-spent): honeylocust, silver maple (where it joined a group of house finches, black-capped chickadees, pine siskins and red-breasted nuthatches scolding a fox squirrel apparently raiding a house finch nest), American elm, Ohio buckeye, Colorado blue spruce, green ash, American linden, and mapleleaf viburnum. Honeylocust is by far its favorite tree, where it appears to mostly get honeylocust leafhoppers and honeylocust plant bugs.

Shortly after the convincing views for Dave Ely and I, a number of things happened in short succession: Rachel arrived; Rachel called the Colorado Rare Bird Alert and put Dave Ely in touch with Dick Schottler regarding general directions to Grandview Cemetery; and the bird disappeared to the northern part of the cemetery, never to be heard or seen for at least 25 hours. This was a most frustrating time period for all concerned.

As birders arrived, they searched in vain all the rest of June 21 and the early morning of June 22. About 8:30am on the 22nd, after most searchers had given up, the bird was relocated by voice in a cottonwood by Gary Matthews and Maggie Boswell during one last drive with the windows down through the cemetery. The reappearance was publicized, birders returned, and several additional people confirmed the sighting. It has been seen every day since, particularly in the morning but occasionally in the afternoon.

Behavioral Notes:

The bird is acting very territorial, with certain honeylocusts in the northwest corner of Section 8 being the center. It engages in chasing and other agonistic behaviors with most birds which enter this area (including black-capped chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, and pine siskins.)

In addition to the tree species mentioned above, it has also been in American Hackberry (*Celtis americana*) and rarely, Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea glauca*). In regards to honeylocust, Tony Leukering suggested that of all the trees present at Grandview Cemetery, they probably look most like many of the southern legume tree species within its normal range.

On one occasion, at about 1:30pm on the 22nd, I heard the bird giving its secondary song, a buzzy, spiraling series of notes that roughly cover the same range of upwardly-progressing notes as the primary song, but in a slower, less direct pattern. This song was not unlike the spiraling song of Cerulean Warbler. Although this song was almost certainly given by the Tropical Parula in question, I never did see the bird. When it clouded over, the bird quit singing altogether and we lost contact.

It usually forages high in deciduous tree crowns, particularly honeylocusts, and occasionally sings for long periods of time without changing position. This is often deep within dense foliage and makes detection difficult. During an active singing period as typically occurs for this individual in early morning, Tony Leukering timed the period between the start of one song and the start of the next at exactly 8 seconds.

All in all, a remarkable bird and record. And for me, the expression "all's well that ends well" seems to fit.

During the evening of June 19 I called Joe Mammoser and said the bird had been present for 2 days in roughly the same location and that it was probably "gettable", if he was interested.

In late morning of June 20 during his lunch hour, Joe Mammoser went to Grandview Cemetery to search for the parula. It was during this visit that he began to suspect (a conviction that grew strong by the end of the visit) that the parula was, indeed, a Tropical Parula, as incredible as that fact was. Misunderstanding my work schedule and thinking that I had truly "retired" from the Colorado State Forest Service, Joe left paper and phone messages at my apartment at midday, stressing the identity he was ready to assign to the parula. I did not get these messages until getting home from work about 5:30pm. I immediately called Joe and we met at the cemetery, along with his brother Steve. Steve, it seems, in response to his brother's call at midday, had gone to the cemetery during the afternoon, heard the bird for several minutes, but could never get a good look at it. None of the three of us heard or saw the bird on the evening of June 20.

Monday night Rachel returned from Washington and planned to be at the cemetery early the next morning. I had also called my friend Dave Ely and he, too, planned to come early if able.

On Tuesday, June 21, I went to the cemetery at 5:45am and parked along the south edge of Section 8 southeast of the buckeye tree. I immediately heard the bird singing and soon located it in a honeylocust in the northwest corner of Section 8. Dave soon arrived, and after several frustrating minutes, he was finally able to get decent views of the bird. It then got it in my scope (Swarovski 20-60X). We shared views and it was this episode that convinced us this bird was, indeed, a Tropical Parula. We saw it singing and eating a large, green, hairless caterpillar (probably a Green Fruitworm (*Lithophane antennata*) or related climbing noctuid. In fact, we were amazed to see the bird sing while the caterpillar was hanging out of its mouth! Field marks on the bird seen better, or for the first time, by me during this view were: 1) absolutely no white eye arcs (which Northern Parula apparently has in all plumages and "all" individuals); 2) more extensive yellow along the sides of the throat, which connects this area (including the yellow front part of the throat) "seamlessly" with the bright yellow lower mandible and which gives the Tropical a different look than the Northern (combined with the lack of white eye crescents, the effect is one of distinct contrast between the dark head/face and bright yellow lower bill, throat sides, and breast); and 3) the yellow flanks, which extend back to the rear edge of the wingbars (not as some books typically depict the yellow flanks of Tropical but typically further than is shown for Northern). Also the wingbars seemed wider ("whiter") than a typical Northern Parula would show. Last, and importantly, the area of the lores was dark blackish-gray (not pure black, as is shown for some breeding male Tropical Parulas). This dark face area gives the bird a distinct "cross-eyed" or "raccoon" look. The upper mandible was dark, as were the legs. The undertail coverts were bright white.

We never heard the bird give any kind of call or "chip" note.

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TROPICAL PARULA SUPPLEMENTAL NARRATIVE TO
DAVID LEATHERMAN'S REPORT TO CO. BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

The bird was initially detected on June 18, 2005, about 8am in Grandview Cemetery, Fort Collins, Larimer County, Colorado. I was birding in the center area of the cemetery just north of Section S and heard a "parula" warbler singing a primary song type well south of my location. In Section 8, about 150 yards south of where I first heard the song, the warbler foraged in an Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) with Black-capped Chickadees. It soon moved to Honeylocusts (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) and a Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*).

The bird was moderately active, foraging from heights of 20 feet and up, and singing roughly every 10 seconds. As warblers go, it was small and short-tailed. It was dark blue-gray above and bright yellow on the throat, breast, and upper belly. It had a light orange "glow" across the middle of the yellow breast that in no way was expressed as a well-defined band. It had two bright white wingbars of about equal width. The face appeared dark, with no light eye-ring or eye arcs. Its eye was black and the lower mandible was bright yellow. Eventually, I got a glimpse of a greenish back patch. Although I have experience with one adult male Tropical Parula (seen from above as it foraged in a small willow on the steep bank of a lake at Anzuldulas State Park in south Texas), at this point I will admit to thinking this was some plumage of Northern Parula I had not seen before. Because of the bird's persistent singing, I assumed this was perhaps a late-migrating, first-spring male not depicted in the standard guide books, and that occasional individuals just must not show white eye arcs. I watched the bird at length (over an hour), as it foraged mostly in honeylocusts, presumably catching the two insects prominent in this type of tree at this time of year: Honeylocust Plant Bug (*Diaphnocoris chlorionis*) and Honeylocust Leafhopper (*Macropsis fumipennis*). I left the bird to itself and finished my circuit of the cemetery, as I have tried to do at least twice a month for the past 25 years or so. Then I drove over to a convenience store payphone northwest of the cemetery to call Rachel Hopper and report to the Cobirds listserv the "parula" and a Mississippi Kite I had seen briefly over my Fort Collins apartment courtyard the evening before. Rachel was in Washington State to attend a funeral. Apparently I misunderstood that she could not, or would not, put these birds on Cobirds. Thus, the parula's presence was not made known as a "Northern" as reported, let alone as a "Tropical", until three days later. This is unfortunate (I am in no way blaming Rachel), as a few birders remarked to me they would have pursued a parula of any type, and, as a consequence, perhaps the bird's true identity would have at least been suspected or known earlier than it was.

On Sunday June 19, I returned to the cemetery about 1pm, just to see if the bird was still present. I heard it sing faintly two times (about 4 minutes apart) from high in a large Plains Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) just onto City Park Nine golf course south of the middle of Grandview Cemetery. This location is about 100 yards south of the initial detection location the day before. I did not see the bird on June 19.

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

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DESCRIPTION -- This is the **most important** part of this report. Include in these details the overall size and shape of the bird, how you placed the bird in the general group that you did, and give as many plumage details as possible, even including those that you feel might not have relevance to the specific identification. Features to include are the color(s) and/or patterns of the head, eyes, bill, back, folded wings, open wings, tail, chin, throat, breast, sides, flanks, belly, vent, and legs. Also, please include, where possible, shape of the whole bird, of the wings - folded or open, of the bill, and of the tail. Please fill out this portion even if photos are accompanying your report. We welcome attachments of additional sheets of description, drawings, field sketches, or copies of field notes.

see attached

Describe the bird's (birds') call(s) and/or song(s), if noted:

see attached

SIMILAR SPECIES -- This is another critical part of your report. Please discuss how you eliminated similar species from consideration.

see attached

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? I have seen one other tropical parula @ Anzac Blvd, S.P., TX 13 April 1998
List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation):

Dunn Warbler Guide

Sibley
National Geo.

Pyle ID

This report is from notes made from (check one) ☐ noted made during observation ☒ noted made after observation ☐ later from memory.

Date and time of written report: 23 June 2005

Reporting observer: Dave Leatherman

Signature: David A. Leatherman

Address: 612 Hoover St. # 7
Ft Collins, CO 80524

Send report to: Colorado Birds Record Committee, Tony Leukering, PO Box 660, Brighton, CO 80601.

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Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

CBRC FILE #: _____
RESULTS: _____

Print this page and then fill out. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species (please include common and scientific names):

TROPICAL PARULA (Parula pitiayumi)

Date(s) of Observation:

18 JUNE 2005, 19 JUNE 2005, 21 JUNE 2005, 22 JUNE 2005

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: male Plumage:
(presumably)

Exact location: Grandview Cemetery, mostly Section 8

County: Larimer Nearest town: Ft Collins Elevation: 5000'

Length of observation:

Time(s) of observation:

JUST under 3 hours

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Dave Ely

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): mob. [initials]

Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observer(s) position):

AM

Optical equipment used:

8x42 binocs 20-60 Swarovski scope

Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): 20 feet (closest) to more distant views

Was (were) bird(s) photographed? Yes If so, are you submitting photos? No

Who took the photograph(s)? Steve Messick, Rachel Hopper, Tony Leokering, Cole Wild, others?

Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred:

mature urban cemetery @ mixture of deciduous & coniferous trees, many dating back to the early 1900's.

Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits:

See
attached
report