

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

CFO-ORC FILE # 2002-119

(A)

NEW STATE RECORD        UNUSUAL RECORD   X  

**Species:** Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*)

**Date:** 4 May 2002

**Number seen:** one

**Sex:** female

**Plumage:** Alternate

**Locality:** Barr Lake S.P.

**Elevation:** about 5000'

**Nearest town:** Brighton

**County:** Adams

**Time observed:** ~07:30

**Duration of observation:** ~4 minutes

**Description:** While birding on the trail near the southwestern corner of Barr Lake S.P., I found a warbler in a single, small, almost unleaved tree. I immediately recognized it to be either a Hermit Warbler (HEWA) or a Hermit-like Hermit x Townsend's warbler hybrid. So, I studied it for the time it allowed me until it left the tree heading north; I watched it fly out of sight toward the east end of Brighton.

The bird was obviously in the Black-throated Green complex of *Dendroica* warblers, having some black on the throat, a yellow face, and obvious white wingbars on gray wings. The crown was olive-brown with black spots; the forehead was yellow. The auriculars were a bit darker and more olive than the bright yellow superciliary, ear surround, and malar. The chin was pale whitish-yellow and the throat was mostly black, with some feathers having pale fringes. The mantle was gray with blackish streaking formed by wide gray fringes on black-centered feathers. The tertials were black with thin, white distal edges. The two white wingbars were formed by white tips to the median and greater secondary coverts, with the upper bar being just slightly wider than the lower bar. The rest of the underparts were white, though the flanks were washed with gray. There was absolutely no hint of yellow on the underparts, save for the chin, and there was no streaking on the sides. The outer rectrices had extensive white inner webs that I occasionally saw when it quickly spread its tail after some maneuver or other and when I watched it leave the tree. The bill, eyes, and legs were blackish, with the bill being of fairly typical *Dendroica* shape, that is not particularly pointed, not particularly long or short; somewhat blunt and thick (for a warbler).

Similar species eliminated by description: The lack of a strong eyeline or auricular patch on a bird in the *Dendroica virens* complex points to HEWA. However, hybrid Hermit x Townsend's warblers can closely approach the appearance of pure HEWAs (Rohwer and Wood 1998, though this source treats only males) and hybrids may be more likely (on distribution and migration-length grounds) to occur in Colorado than are pure HEWAs. Thus, observers need to carefully document HEWA-like birds to determine whether there are any Townsend's Warbler (TOWA) genes expressed in the plumage. I did take particular care to look for these features, which usually include some yellow on the breast or sides, green in the back, lack of back streaking, and a stronger-than-normal eyeline and/or auricular patch. This bird showed none of those features, so I believe it to be a pure HEWA.



**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** The call note was somewhat like that of Audubon's Warbler with which I am very familiar and very much like that of TOWA, with which I am much less familiar.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen ~30-40 HEWAs and 100s of TOWAs. I have seen no birds that appeared to be Hermit x Townsend's warbler hybrids. Additionally, I have seen a few Golden-cheeked Warblers and 100s to 1000s of other similar species.

**Light conditions:** The sky was partly cloudy with the sun behind me.

**Optical equipment used:** Swarovski 8.5x42

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated closest distance at ~5 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** none

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** none

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** I did not photograph

**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

**a) at time of observation:** none

**b) after observation:** Rohwer and Wood 1998

**Reporting observer:** Tony Leukering

**Signature:**



**Address:** Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603

**Date report was written:** 28 December 2002 from extensive notes that I wrote immediately after the bird disappeared into the distance

**Literature Cited:**

Rohwer, S. and C. Wood. 1998. Three hybrid zones between Hermit and Townsend's Warblers in Washington and Oregon. Auk 115:284-310.