



2003-32,33

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MEADOWLARK



Colorado Bird Records Committee
%Tony Leukering
P.O. Box 660
Brighton, Colorado 80601

16 May 2003

Dear Tony,

My postdoctoral position at Dartmouth wound down over the winter, so I was looking around for a faculty or research position somewhere. Thankfully, I had a number of options. I decided on Oklahoma, where I have been living for almost two months. On 26-28 April 2003, my wife (Brenda) and I joined Dan Reinking, Bonnie Gall, and Jim Arterburn in the Oklahoma panhandle. During that trip, Brenda and I snuck into Colorado for parts of two days, mostly because she had never seen Lesser Prairie-Chickens (and, heck, I needed the species in the state). We ended up seeing a number of interesting birds, the most notable of which were a lovely Sprague's Pipit (27 April) and a stunning male Black-throated Blue Warbler (28 April). I was bright enough to realize that the pipit was likely scarce in Colorado, so I wrote a description soon after seeing it. However, I did not realize that it was on your state's review list until a few days ago, so I apologize for the delay in reporting it. Enclosed you will find a completed BRC report for the sighting, along with a photocopy of my notes.

In these notes you will observe a couple of other tidbits. I did not write much about the warbler, chiefly because the identification was obvious and Brenda actually got some decent video footage. I can send a copy of that footage to you if you wish. More importantly, you will note that I am comfortable that we had an Eastern Meadowlark singing at the famous prairie-chicken lek east of Campo. Given that species' history in Colorado, along with your committee's treatment of past claims, I am not sure what you want to do with the record. We heard the bird many, many times both in the late afternoon and early evening of 27 April and again in the morning of 28 April. It never uttered anything but a typical *S. magna* song (some of which Brenda got on video while she taped a nearby Pronghorn). But, the bird did not call (at least, not that I noted) and I got only minimal plumage detail, largely because as it was teed up singing on 28 April we were confined to the car as we watched the chickens dance.

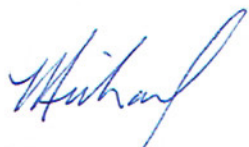
Not surprisingly, I have heard the songs of thousands of meadowlarks of both species. This bird was dead-on Eastern, a species I now live with daily. I realize that these



species can learn each other's songs, but that notion also raises some conceptual problems. If Westerns are in Colorado singing like Easterns, they must be dispersing there from a zone of sympatry. I do not see how that occurrence is any more likely than an Eastern showing up from the same spot; indeed, I imagine it is less likely. Moreover, given the abundance of Easterns in east-central New Mexico and the adjacent Texas panhandle (e.g., I was working around Milnesand, N.M., 8–11 April and had nothing but *S. m. lilianae* Easterns), that species' partly migratory behavior, and the similarity of the shortgrass habitat throughout this region, I would be surprised if Lilian's did not occur occasionally in Baca County. To me it makes as much sense for that taxon to reach the county as the Chihuahuan Raven, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cassin's Sparrow, Scaled Quail, and various other examples.

Anyway, for what it is worth, you have a copy of my notes. If you would like to review the record, that is fine with me. If you would prefer to file my notes in the "hmm, that's interesting" drawer, that is fine too.

Best wishes,



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Milnesand (cont'd)

Brown-headed Cowbird 40
House Finch 10Also: European Starling 15
House Sparrow 50

Side-blotched Lizard 1

Coyote ~10 (down choruses on 09 and 10 April)

Striped Skunk 1

Pinehorn 8

~~Black~~ Black-tailed Prairie Dog 50 (two towns)

Orl's Kangaroo Rat 4 (mornings of 09 and 10 April)

Audubon's Cotton-tail 2

COLORADO

27-28 April 2003

Baca County; Comanche National Grassland

We birded from Three Corners (where Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma meet) to Campo, traveled from there quickly up to Springfield, then returned to Campo. We traveled southeast from Campo to well-known lek for Lesser Prairie-Chickens, located along County Rd. 6 ~12 km east of town. We spent the night in the parking area for the lek, we left after a few hours and after being treated to a marvelous show.

Great Blue Heron 1

White-faced Ibis 2 at Campo

Mallard 2

Northern Shorelark 3

Swainson's Hawk 4

American Kestrel 4

Lesser Prairie-Chicken 5 displaying ♂♂ (28 April)

Scaled Quail 10

Long-billed Curlew 1 in a display flight (27 April)

Mourning Dove 25

Great Horned Owl 1 at a ranch at 37°04'34"N

Burrowing Owl 6 102°51'17"W

Chimney Swift 1 at Springfield

Northern Flicker 2 *C. a. canescens*

Say's Phoebe 5

Western Kingbird 4

Loggerhead Shrike 3

Western Scrub Jay 2 *A. c. gutturi*

Chihuahuan Raven 6

Barn Swallow 4

Bushtit 2

Rock Wren 5

Benick's Wren 1 singing near Three Corners

Eastern Bluebird 1 ♂ at the ranch (27 April)

Northern Mockingbird 3

Sprague's Pipit 1 (27 April)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK

MICHAEL
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Myrtle Warbler 6

Canyon Towhee 1 near Three Corners

Cassin's Sparrow 25

Chipping Sparrow 10

Brewer's Sparrow 2; subspecies?

Vesper Sparrow 12

Lark Sparrow 30

Lark Bunting 1 singing ♂ at the lek (28 April)

Grasshopper Sparrow 2

White-crowned Sparrow 40? 1 *orientalis*; 1 *gambelii*

Eastern Meadowlark 1 singing at the lek (both days)

Western Meadowlark 75

Common Grackle 3 at Campo

Great-tailed Grackle 1 ♂ in Springfield

Also: Coyote 4

Pinehorn 10

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The Sprague's Pipit was in shortgrass prairie along CRG ~10 km northeast of the Three Corners Monument. We viewed the bird from our car, both of us getting good looks out my window. The bird was the size and shape (roughly) of an American Pipit, although it was a little plumper, with a slightly shorter tail. The bill was longish and thin, somewhat warbler-like. The legs and feet were pink. It did not "pump" its tail as it walked. The plumage was distinctive. The dark eye was prominent in the unmarked tan face. The crown and nape were streaked finely with black, though the streaks widened from the forehead to the nape. The throat was slightly whiter than the face or breast. The breast and belly were warm buff, the breast overlain with a band of black streaks; the breast streaks were short and fine. The flanks were buff, the belly and the undertail coverts whitish. The mantle and scapulars were black with buff-white edges, creating a pattern somewhere between scaling and streaking. When the bird jumped into flight it showed ~3 clean white feathers on either side of the tail. It ~~flashed~~ shot upward at a steep angle, then "parachuted" back to earth quickly, hiding in dense grass.

The Eastern Meadowlark sang ~20 times in the late afternoon and nearly continuously from 0620-0740 MDT. I never heard the bird call, but I also never heard it utter any sound other than a typical whistling Eastern meadowlark song: either "see-awee-see-er" or, on ~~many~~ occasion, "see-a-awee-see-er." I saw the bird only at a distance, but from what I could judge the molars were clean white. Moreover, the bird was decidedly pale, strongly suggesting *S. m. l. annae*, dozens of which I saw in eastern New Mexico in mid April. The bird also had a very bold transverse line, which contrasted sharply with the pale face. I never got a good look at the tail patterns, and did not note the flanks.

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