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COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

PAINTED BUNTING

Passerina ciris

Location: Cottonwood Canyon; SE of Kim; western Baca County, Colorado

Date: May 28, 1994

Setting:

I ran into George (last name?), a birder from Chicago, in the camping area in northwestern Cottonwood Canyon. George told me that he had found a male Painted Bunting that morning and that it had been actively singing in the company of a male Lazuli Bunting about 1.5 miles southeast of the camping area. I drove down the road and found the area. It was a small grove of very large Gambel's oak on the west side of Cottonwood Creek. The surrounding area was open grass and brush near the lower rim of the canyon. I immediately heard the bird singing and found it about 15 minutes later. At first I observed the bird alone. Later I watched it with Joe Roller. He arrived a little later but he had already seen the bird earlier in the day.

The bird was a breeding plumaged male. I watched it for about 35 minutes, from 4:10 p.m. - 4:45 p.m. Although it sang vigorously, and the bird was brightly colored, it could be amazingly hard to see. This was because it delivered its song from just inside the canopy at the top of the oaks. Thus it remained hidden in the dark green leaves. When it flew from perch to perch it appeared to be a very small, dark red "bullet" of a bird, with whirring, direct flight. After about 15 minutes it perched high in the small tips of a dead tree. From this exposed perch it tipped its head back to deliver its song, which was a high, rapid, warble. The song was reminiscent of a Lazuli Bunting song, but more musical and "tinkling", less repetitious and without buzzy notes. Near the end of the observation period I watched the bird in the open from a distance of about 25 feet, for over 5 minutes, with B & L 10 x 42 binoculars. Conditions were very good, with blue skies, sun and no wind.

Description:

The bird was an unmistakable male in breeding plumage. It was small and plump, just about the same size as a Lazuli Bunting, about 6" long. It had a small, dark, conical bill. It had a dark blue head ("cowl"), chartreuse green back, red rump, and a red chin, throat, breast and undersides. The wings were basically dark, being blackish with greenish tones and a dark reddish shoulder. The tail was blackish. The bird had a thin, complete red eyering around a black eye.

Similar Species:

Not much else is even similar. Varied Bunting has a blue (not red) rump, and lacks both the green back and the red eyering.

Experience with Species:

I have seen quite a few Painted Buntings in other areas (Big Bend, coastal Texas, southern Florida).

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

Mark Janos

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001