

## COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

PAINTED BUNTINGPasserina ciris

Location: Ft. Lyons Wildlife Easement (near the intersection of Roads HH and 16); Bent County; Ft. Lyons, Colorado

Date: May 12, 1996

Background:

I was birding with Brandon Percival. We were walking along the edge of the a dense elm grove. On one side of us was a grassy opening; on the other was the dark cooler interior of the grove. It was about 8:30 a.m. and we were walking side by side when we scared this bird out of the grass where it must have been feeding unseen on the ground. It was about 20 feet in front of us when it flushed and it flew about another 20 feet and perched in the trees about 5 feet off the ground. We observed it for about 2 minutes unobstructed. Then the bird flew back down to the ground. We flushed it again and it flew back into the trees where we lost it. We were at a distance of 20-50 feet the whole time. The bird was 0-5 feet high: on the ground; on grass stems and in the trees. The entire observation period was less than 5 minutes. We had bright sun, but the bird was usually in dappled shade. We observed the bird with binoculars (mine are B & L 10x40s). The bird was silent.

I was initially baffled by the bird when it flew up. It looked something like a too-greenish female tanager. I realized what it was when it finally turned its head and gave us a view of the conical bill.

Description:

This was a female-plumaged bird. The first time it flew up it looked like a dull greenish blur. The second time it flew up from the ground it was in the sun and it showed an incredible bluish-green color. It was small and plump, just about the same size and shape as a Lazuli Bunting, about 6" long. It had a small, pale (vaguely yellowish) bill that was short, stout and clearly conical. It was a quite uniform bird, lacking wingbars or other flashy field marks. Nonetheless it was impressive looking. It was an unusually intense yellowish-green (pale chartreuse) on the uppersides. The wings and tail were blackish. The undersides were unstreaked creamy yellow, with the chest and undertail coverts the most intense yellowish. It had a thin distinct white eyering.

Similar Species:

The greenish color of this bird was very distinctive: Female tanagers (Summer and Scarlet) lack the eyering, are longer, slimmer and with a heavier, less conical bill. Female Varied, Lazuli and Indigo buntings are brown, not green and yellow and lack an eyering. The green color of the female Painted Bunting, in North America, is nearly unique.

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 immediately after observation.

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