

2003-69

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

CBRC FILE #: 2003-69

RESULTS: A

Species: Blue-headed Vireo

Scientific Name: *Vireo solitarius*

Date(s) of occurrence: 9/7/03

Number of birds seen: 1

Sex: ?

Plumage:

Exact location: Shelterbelt along park entrance road 50-80 yards east of Foster Grove Campground, Bonny State Park

County: Yuma

Nearest town: Idalia

Elevation:

Length of observation: 20 seconds total (three different looks)

Time(s) of observation: approx. 11:00 AM

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Andrew Spencer

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): none

Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observers position: The day was overcast. Both of the observers and the bird were inside the shelterbelt, where light levels were not particularly high, but not particularly low, and color contrast was good.

Optical equipment used: Pentax 8x42 binoculars.

Distance to bird(s) (estimated, unless otherwise noted): closest: 10 feet at eye level. farthest: 20 feet away, 12 feet up.

Was (Were) bird(s) photographed? no

If so, are you submitting photos?

Who took the photograph(s)?

Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: The bird frequented the interior of the large junipers in the shelterbelt. However, it was also seen in some adjacent deciduous trees.

Describe the bird's (birds') behaviors, particularly behaviors that were used in supporting the identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: The bird was actively foraging on the interior and along the edge of the shelterbelt. It was a member of a large mixed-species flock that included many Cassin's and Warbling Vireos and some Wilson's, Yellow, and Townsend's Warblers. During my first brief glimpse of the bird, only its head was visible, but I saw the sharp contrast between the gray head/cheek and the white throat, and immediately alerted Andrew to the presence of a possible Blue-headed Vireo. I then lost the bird, but Andrew found it on the other side of the same tree and confirmed the ID. We then lost contact with the bird very briefly and rediscovered it inside the shelterbelt. It had just captured a Viceroy and was in the process of consuming it. During this phase I did not see the bird clearly but got strongly suggestive views of its overall coloration. After losing the bird a third time, I rediscovered it two minutes later about thirty yards east of its original location. This time the bird hopped right into the open on the near branches of a juniper, about 10 feet away from me at eye level, and I was able to study it in good light for approximately four seconds. This was our last contact with the bird.

DESCRIPTION - The bird was clearly a Solitary-type Vireo. It was the same size and shape of the many Cassin's Vireos in the same flock, and its foraging behavior was similar—active, but slightly more sluggish than that of the nearby warblers. It was chunkier than most warblers, with a shorter tail and thicker bill.

Plumage: the bird had a medium-gray head which was interrupted by thick, bright white spectacles and which contrasted strikingly with the bird's clean white throat. During my initial view and again during the final, definitive look, I was able to see that the line of demarcation between the throat and the gray cheek was sharply defined, in stark contrast to that of the Cassin's Vireos in the same flock. The bird's back was olive-greenish. The clean white of its throat extended to the rest of the underparts, except for the bird's flanks, which were a very bright, attractive yellow-green. The bird's wings and tail were dark. Two bright white wingbars were obvious. I did not know at the time to look for a vent strap on the bird, and consequently saw none.

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

SIMILAR SPECIES - The main source of potential confusion lies with Cassin's Vireo, bright individuals of which can approach Blue-headed in appearance. The shelterbelt was literally crawling with Cassin's Vireos at the time of the Blue-headed observation, so comparative looks were easy to get. In particular, just before my last and best encounter with the Blue-headed, I had been studying a (rather dull) Cassin's in the same spot, and was struck by the blurriness of the boundary between the bird's throat and its darker head, the lack of contrast between head color and back color, and the far less vibrantly colored flanks. In comparison, the Blue-headed looked as though it had been painted using four bright colors which had not been allowed to mix. It was a very strikingly colored bird.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? I have seen hundreds of Blue-headed Vireos, mostly while birding in high school in eastern South Dakota and college in Massachusetts. I have seen many dozens of Cassin's Vireos, mostly while in grad school in Oregon, but also every fall since then on the Colorado plains. This was the first Blue-headed Vireo I have seen in Colorado and the first I have seen in two years.

List books, guides, recordings, or other sources consulted and how these influenced your identification (during and after observation): I did not consult the field guides, but I was influenced in my identification by the post to Cobirds by Tony Leukering a few days before ("a BLUE-HEADED VIREO! The bright white throat sharply contrasting with the dark auriculars, and the bright green back and bright greeny-yellow flanks and vent strap did the job for me."—TL, 9/2/03). Note: I did not see any vent strap on my BHVI, but neither did I look.

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

Date and time of written report: September 10, 2003

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Signature:

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