

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

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WORM-EATING WARBLER
Helmitheros vermivorusLocation: Willow Creek; Lamar; Prowers County, ColoradoDate: May 5, 1996

This bird was originally found by others.

Background:

There was a large contingent (about 15 birders) searching for warblers here on the 5th. The bird was cooperative and quite easy to approach as it fed on the ground in deep shade under Russian Olives along a swampy area. At least 15 other birders (including Peter Gent, Brandon Percival and Vic Zerbi) observed this bird. The sky was clear and conditions were good. I observed the bird on about three occasions including about 10 minutes at 10:30 a.m. We observed it with our binoculars (mine are B & L Elites, 10x40) as it fed in dense tangles and brush -- sometimes in clear view and sometimes hidden. It probed dead leaves, crept along on fallen tree trunks, and generally acted quite secretive. The bird moved slowly. I never saw it above about 3 feet high.

Description:

This was a medium-sized warbler about 5" long. It was dark, compact, plain, short-tailed and big-billed. Its prominent pale pinkish bill was vaguely chisel-shaped and sharply pointed. It had pinkish legs and feet. The back, wings, rump and tail were a clear plain brown color with an olive tinge. It lacked wingbars or other markings. The head, chin, throat and breast were a beautiful yellowish buff color. The lower breast faded to a duller tan color and the undertail coverts were pale buff. The yellowish head had 2 prominent black crown stripes and two black eyelines. The crown stripes were separated by a buffy yellowish central crown stripe and there was a yellowish superciliary. The striping and head color gave the bird a very striking appearance.

Similar Species:

Sparrows can be ruled out by this bird's slender shape and the long, slender, pointed bill. Vireos have heavy, slightly hooked bills. Warbling Vireo is chunkier, and lacks the head stripes. Philadelphia Vireo has yellow tones totally lacking in this bird and lacks the black head stripes. Tennessee Warbler has whiter underparts, a gray crown and lacks the head stripes. Orange-crowned Warbler lacks the crown stripes and is yellower below. Virginia's and Nashville warblers have yellow breasts and lack the head strips. Female Black-throated Blue Warbler shows a whitish spot in the wing and lacks the crown stripes. Swainson's Warbler lacks the golden or orange tones to the foreparts, has a rufous cap and possess a dark brown, not black, eyestripe.

Experience with Species:

I have seen Worm-eating Warblers twice before in Colorado, in May 1989 at La Junta and May 1993 at Lamar. I have seen others, including many during spring migration on the Texas coast. I have seen all other similar birds discussed above.

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

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001

