

1997-98
ACCEPTED 7-0

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

WORM-EATING WARBLER

Helminthos vermivorus

Location: Lake Henry; Ordway; Crowley County, Colorado

Date: May 9-12, 1997

Background:

This bird was part of the incredible migrant fall out at Lake Henry and was seen by many others as well. I saw this bird on the 9th, 11th and 12th. It was fairly easy to locate as it foraged 6 - 10 feet off the ground, but it also foraged high in the trees on occasions. And although secretive, once found, it was also rather tame. It probed dead curled leaves (especially ones still on the twigs), crept along on fallen tree trunks, and worked the bark, trunks and twigs near at hand. While feeding, the bird was rather nuthatch-like. Once located, the bird was cooperative and quite easy to approach as it fed and foraged. I observed the bird on about three occasions between 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. on the 9th for a total of about 10 minutes. I observed it with binoculars (B & L Elites, 10x42) at close range (20' - 50').

Description:

This was a plain-colored, medium-sized warbler (about 5" long). Overall it was rather dingy, compact, plain, short-tailed and big-billed. It had a prominent pinkish bill, rather large for a warbler, chisel-like and sharp. It had pinkish legs and feet. The upperparts (back, wings, rump and tail) were a uniform brownish-olive color. There were no wingbars. The head and underparts (chin, throat and breast) were buff colored and notably lighter than the back. The throat and undertail coverts were even paler buff. There were four dark, longitudinal stripe on the head: two on the crown and two through the eyes. The crown stripes were separated by a buff central crown stripe and there was a buffy-yellow supercilary.

Similar Species:

The slender shape and long, slender, pointed bill rule out sparrows. 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 is a smaller bird, 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 stripes. Female Black-throated Blue Warbler shows a whitish spot in the wing and lacks the crown stripes. Swainson's Warbler lacks the strong buff tones to the foreparts, has a vaguely rufous cap and possess a dark brown, not black, eyestripe.

Experience with Species:

I have seen Worm-eating Warblers three times before in Colorado. 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 immediately after observation.

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