

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD REPORT  
☒ RARE OR UNUSUAL RECORD ☐ NEW STATE RECORD

34-87-53  
CFO-ORC FILE NO. ☐ ACCEPTED ☐ REJECTED

Species: Vermilion Flycatcher

Pyrocephalus rubinus

(Vernacular Name)

(Scientific Name-use binomial)

Date(s): 4 April 1987

Time Bird Seen: 09:12 to 10:25

Locality: W edge of Rollinsville, Colorado, to ca 1/2 mi W of Rollinsville, Colorado

Nearest Town: Rollinsville, Colorado

County: Gilpin

Other observers who independently identified this bird: (none)

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

Optical Equipment: Leitz 10 X 40 BA Trinovid Binoculars

If photographed, type of equipment used: Nikon F3 with Nikkor 80-200 f4.0 with 2X teleconverter

Light Conditions: sunshine

Distance from bird (how measured): closest: ca 12 meters; estimated visually

Number of Birds Seen: 1 Sex: male Plumage: breeding plumage

Describe the bird's overall behavior and demeanor: The bird was very alert and active; it perched on mullein spikes, barbed-wire fence lines, power lines (above the gravel road), and bushes, always in the open; it occasionally flew out into the air or down to the ground, apparently fly-catching; its pattern of flight was quite similar to that of phoebes--Say's Phoebe, for example; when it perched it pumped its tail; it did not appear to be especially wary of me except perhaps when I approached closer than 12 meters to photograph it--it seemed to fly from its perch in response to my close approach on one occasion and so I refrained from coming that close for the rest of the time I observed and photographed it.

Describe in great detail the bird's size, overall shape, plumage and color-pattern. Include details on shape of bill, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to the marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance in field guide descriptions is not enough. Describe what you actually saw in the field:

Please see the accompanying photographs I took of the bird; I assume that these photographs will adequately document the record, especially along with the enclosed letter to Hugh Kingery describing my observations. Please note my comment in that letter on the color of the bird, as the slides and prints do not show the crown and underparts quite as brightly colored as I remember them to have been, and I am assuming that the photographic film (Fugichrome ASA 400) was not able to fully register the color's brightness.

(OVER)



Describe the bird's song or call, if heard, including method of delivery, i.e., from perch, in flight, etc: The bird was silent.

Describe the habitat in which you observed this bird: Open grassy S-facing slope bordering flood-plain of creek; on this slope are a gravel road, railroad tracks, and 3 barbed-wire fence lines; also on some parts of the slope are erect mullein spikes from 1986; a few ponderosa pines and a few bushes are on the slope; telephone poles with phone lines and power lines follow the railroad tracks and the road; the ground was partly snow-covered on the slope; at the upper border of the open grassy slope is a ponderosa pine forest.

How were similarly appearing species eliminated? Identification was instantly obvious upon first viewing the bird with the 10X binoculars from the car at a distance of ca 30 m when it was perched on the power line above the road; there was no need to consider other possibilities; my first thought upon spotting the bird on the power line from the car, with the unaided eye, was "What in the world could that little bright-red bird be?", knowing that nothing like that is normally found there.

Prior experience with this and similarly appearing species: I have seen breeding-plumage males of this species in southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, southern Texas, and the highlands of Ecuador; number of such sightings: ca 50. I am quite familiar with the following similar-appearing species: Red Crossbill, Cassin's Finch, House Finch, Purple Finch, Scarlet Tanager, Summer Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Cardinal, Pine Grosbeak.

Books, illustrations and advice consulted and how did these influence this documentation? See attached letter to Hugh Kingery; I consulted these field guides to compare the shade and brightness of the red color of the bird, as I remembered it, with that shown in those guides, because I do not feel that the photographs are very accurate in that regard; I did not refer to any field guides or other sources for identifying the bird, as there was no need to do so.

This report was written from notes made during X after X observation; from memory X

PRINT NAME: Robert R. Cohen

Street Address: Dept. Biology - Box 53, Metropolitan State College  
1006 11th Street

SIGNATURE: *Robert R. Cohen*

DATE: 23 April 1987

Town and State: Denver, Colorado

ZIP: 80204

Return to: JACK REDDALL - 14450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80110



# Metropolitan State College

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS  
Department of Biology  
Box 53

16 April 1987

Hugh Kingery  
869 Milwaukee  
Denver, CO 80206

Dear Hugh:

Enclosed are prints from some of the slides I took of the Vermilion Flycatcher (Pyrocephalus rubinus) near Rollinsville, Colorado, the morning of 4 April 1987.

I observed this bird from 09:12 to 10:25 Standard Time, on the hillside immediately W of the town of Rollinsville: from ca  $\frac{1}{4}$  mi W of Colorado Highway 119 to ca  $\frac{1}{2}$  mi W of Colorado Highway 119, along the road to Tolland and the East Portal of the Moffat Tunnel. The bird was quite active, perching on mullein spikes, fence lines, power lines, and bushes, and frequently flying out into the air or down to the ground, apparently fly-catching.

During that time there was a wind from the east at ca 5 to 15 mph, the sky was clear and the sun was shining, and the air temperature rose from about 35°F at 09:12 to about 45°F at 10:25.

The bird kept in the open and ranged from the open area above (N of) the Tolland road to the edge of the flood plain of South Boulder Creek, below (S of) the railroad tracks. As warm as it was, it is probable that stoneflies were coming off the creek at that time, although I did not happen to see any.

I was able to approach the bird to a distance of about 12 meters, for photography, before it appeared to become wary of me. The photographs were taken with a Nikon F3 camera with Nikkor 80-200 f 4.0 telephoto lens and Nikkor 2X teleconverter, using Fugichrome ASA 400 color slide film. The panorama photograph was taken looking west along the fence-line that runs parallel to the railroad tracks and on the S side of those railroad tracks, at a point about 0.3 mi to 0.4 mi W of Colorado Highway 119; the open area in the lower part of the photograph is the flood-plain of the creek, on the N side of the creek; the thin black line that is almost horizontal, in the right  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the photograph just below halfway from bottom to top, is the railroad tracks; the tracks can be followed in the photograph, across from right to left to the bridge where the road passes under the tracks about 1 mile W of Rollinsville. Just out of view on the R side of the photograph is the road to the U.S. Forest Service Work Station. IN the upper left part of the photograph is part of the Continental Divide



between Rollins Pass and James Peak, almost entirely snow-covered. The Vermilion Flycatcher is perched on the second metal post of the fence line distant from the large wooden post, just a little to the R and a little below the center of the photograph; its crest is at the level of the railroad track in the background. That photograph was taken with the telephoto system set at 160 mm. The other photo of the bird on that same fence line was taken immediately before the panorama photograph from the same location and with the camera telephoto system set at 400 mm; the bird was perched on a twisted-wire spanner between two of the thin wooden posts and also halfway between the third metal post W of the large wooden post and the second metal post W of the large wooden post; the large wooden post is in the photograph at the lower left edge, out of focus. The bird is perched with his body facing E and his head turned to the NE or NNE.

The other photos that I include were ones I took about 15 to 20 minutes later, when the bird was perching on and foraging from mullein spikes in the open area uphill from (N of) the Highway Dept. equipment storage buildings on the N side of the Tolland road, at the W edge of the town and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mi W of Colorado Highway 119.

An observation on the form and behavior of the bird: it pumped its tail as a phoebe does (and as the field guides state) and its flight was very much like that of a phoebe. It's been several years since I've seen the species elsewhere, and I didn't recall having noticed how phoebe-ish its movements were, previously.

To my eyes the bird's red color was brighter and in a sense richer than in the slides or the prints. Oh: I had the prints made from the slides at The Slideprinter, via the Type R process; the prints match the slides fairly well. The color of the underparts looked more like a fluorescent scarlet to me, very close to the following: [REDACTED] However, the color was not anything like that shown in the plate for the species opposite p. 286 of the National Geographic Society's Field Guide to the Birds of North America--it was not that deep a red. Nor was it as deep a red as that in the photo on p. 275 of the Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding, Vol. 2 (both books copyrighted 1983). On the other hand, the color was more intense than that shown on p. 197 of Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies (1980) (and the crest did not have the shape shown in that plate, as the photographs show).

In one photo of the bird on a mullein spike, some dark areas show on the bird's breast and belly; these are deeper parts of the breast and belly contour feathers that are showing because the bird was being buffeted by the wind, from the side, at that moment.

The bird was seen by one other person, a student who was accompanying me: Geoffrey Gardella. Geoffrey is not a birder but he is a very bright biology major. He watched the bird at relatively close range (20-40 meters) in plain view for several minutes and helped me keep track of it when I went looking for a birder who lives nearby. (That birder was not home, unfortunately.)

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Enclosed are two sets of prints: one for the DFO records and the other for the CFO records; also enclosed are two copies of this letter, for those records --I think that if the copy of the letter can be included the record will be more complete, but of course that is up to those organizations.

Thanks for your kind assistance in this endeavor; best wishes in the Breeding Bird Survey work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bob Cohen".

Robert R. Cohen, Ph.D.  
Professor of Biology





34-87-53

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VERMILION FLYCATCHER

Pyrocephalus rubinus

Gilpin Co.

Gilpin Co.

04-04-87

Robert Cohen

3-17





34-87-53

34-87-53  
VERMILION FLYCATCHER  
*Pyrocephalus rubinus*  
Gilpin Co.  
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Robert Cohen