

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

34-94-47

ACCEPTED

VERMILION FLYCATCHER

Pyrocephalus rubinus

Location: Lake Hasty Campground (below John Martin Res.); near Caddoa; Bent County, Colorado

Date: May 13 and 16, 1994

Chris Wood found this pair of birds.

Setting:

The campground at Lake Hasty is an open park-like area. Grassy campsites and playgrounds are shaded by large elms, cottonwoods and locusts.

On May 13th I found both male and female near campsite 16 about 10:00 in the morning. The female was getting dried blades of grass and twigs from the ground and constructing a nest. The nest was about 15 feet up and about 8 feet out from the trunk of an elm tree. It was situated in a horizontal "Y" of a 3" branch. The nest was obviously recently begun. It was a flimsy cup, about 2-3" in diameter, consisting of twigs and dried grasses. The female picked up grasses off the ground in her bill, flew to the cup, placed the grass into the nest and sat in the nest, sculpting it with her breast. I never saw the male involved in nest building on the 13th, but it did actively flycatch in the nearby area. I watched both birds for about 30 minutes.

I returned on May 16th and could not find the female nor the nest. I finally found what was left of the nest on the ground beneath the nest site. I located the male a little further to the west across a grassy field. The male was actively doing a display flight and song in this open area. He would fly very high into the sky, over 100 feet, and raise his red crest while fluttering his wings. At the same time he sang a wheezy song similar to an Eastern Kingbird. I did not see the female on the 16th.

On both days I observed these birds from 30-100 feet through B & L 10 x 42 binoculars.

Description:

Male: Unmistakable. Much smaller than Western Kingbird; about 6" long. Stubby and compact, with a small, dark bill. Brilliant red cap and undersides. Reddest on crown, least red on undertail coverts and vent area, which had a whitish wash. Face, wings, back, rump and tail blackish. The bird had weak, brownish wingbars.

Female: Size and shape of the male but much plainer and not red. Greyish-brown on face and upperparts. Wings, rump and back grey-brown. No wingbars. Dirty white below with vague grey streaks on the breast. Distinctive salmon pink lower flanks and lower belly and undertail coverts. Brown face with weak white superciliary.

Similar Species:

Male only similar to Scarlet Tanager which has much larger bill, does not have dark back nor dark face. Female distinguished from Eastern Phoebe, which wags tail, lacks face pattern of this bird, does not have streaks below and lacks salmon color on lower belly. Say's Phoebe darker below, lacks face pattern and streaks below, has buffy-orange, not salmon belly. Empidonaces and warblers lack combination of no wingbars, salmon lower belly and faint superciliary.

Experience with Species:

I have seen male and female Vermilion Flycatchers on many previous occasions, including one female in Colorado.

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

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