

CFO  
34-96-45

Accepted 7-0

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Black Phoebe

Date(s): 19 July 1996

Time seen: 12-1 p.m.

Locality: Rio Grande River at crossing of Road G, between Antonito and Mesita;  
Conejos and Costilla counties. Southernmost crossing of Rio Grande in Colorado.

Latilong: 25 Optical equipment: 8x40 Bausch & Lomb binoculars

PHOTOS - Several  
slides\*

Number of birds seen: 1 (??) Sex: ? Plumage: Adult

Light conditions: Excellent: bright sun; seen from all angles.

Distance from bird: 20-200 feet

Weather at time of observation: Hot, dry (80-90 degrees)

Prior weather & number of days since change: The day before the mountains had had strong thunderstorms, although we don't think the storm spread to the middle of the San Luis Valley. No other information on prior weather.

Describe habitat: Rio Grande River flows along here, perhaps 100 feet wide (river is low this year). One tree, a locust, grows on the west side. Upstream from the bridge are some low cliffs--20-40 feet high which extend for 100-200 feet. Otherwise, grass & forbs grow by riverside. On the east side low cliffs, 20-40 feet high, extend downstream from the bridge for several hundred yards. At the bridge abutment grow chokecherries, buffaloberry, and some other bushes. The bridge is an old one with wooden underpinnings (where swallows nest) and two rather odd beams hanging vertically by cables, on the west side.

Describe behavior: Bird first seen in lower part of The Tree. It fed actively and chased other birds out of the tree, viz., a Sage Thrasher and a Com. Nighthawk and maybe another Black Phoebe. It then flew under the bridge and perched on the hanging beam cables; returned to the locust and then flew across to the east side of the river. A Say's Phoebe seemed to have a territory here and it chased the Black Phoebe until the latter "hid" on a bridge beam and the Say's couldn't seem to see it.

The Black perched under the bridge, 50 feet above the water, on a cross beam, for 10 minutes, and preened.

Eventually the Black Phoebe and another bird which I (Hugh) thought looked like it chased downstream and disappeared. I did not see the second bird well enough to confirm its identity.

We never definitely saw two Black Phoebes, though two may have been there.

We returned to the bridge at 4 p.m. and stayed an hour but saw no sign of the Black Phoebe.

Field marks observed: size, color, pattern, shape, bill, etc.:

Shape like flycatcher with slightly crested head.

Black head and chest, black tail (top); white belly.

Gray back. Tail gray underneath.

Wings grayish-black; primaries black with longitudinal white edges; two faint wing bars above the primaries.

A white smudge on the breast at the bend of the wing.

Size: slightly smaller than Say's Phoebe chasing it.

It wagged its tail occasionally, but not constantly.

Another reason to suspect two birds: the wing pattern did not always seem to match the above description: the white in the primaries didn't always show.

Bird's call or song: Silent.

Field marks not seen: We did not note white undertail coverts, per se.

Similar species: Say's Phoebe: larger, salmon or yellow on breast, brownish rather than black. Eastern Phoebe: gray, not black; has light throat and chest, not black.

Prior experience: We have seen Black Phoebes at Durango and in Arizona.

Description from: Notes taken in field. No books consulted.

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