

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD \_\_\_\_\_

UNUSUAL RECORD X

Accepted 7-0

**Species:** Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*)**Date:** 25 May 1996**Number seen:** one**Sex:** male**Plumage:** adult?**Locality:** Monte Vista NWR**Elevation:** 7650'**Nearest town:** Monte Vista**County:** Rio Grande**Time observed:** off and on from about 6:30 MDT to at least 10:30 MDT**Duration of observation:** I watched bird for at least 10 minutes

**Description:** This bird had been found by Bonnie Stout while attempting to start her work doing point counts for the Colorado Bird Observatory on the Refuge. She happened to park her car that morning at the woodlot about a mile south of the Refuge HQ along the east side of Rt. 15. She heard the bird singing and didn't quite recognize the song. She found the bird and watched it for quite a while, went back to where the point count crew was staying on the Refuge and left me a note. By chance, I came in early from point counts, saw the note, and went to look for the bird. I looked and listened intently for the bird with no luck around 9:10 MDT. I was just about to leave when Bonnie happened by again, so we redoubled our efforts to find it. Shortly after Bonnie's arrival, she found the bird foraging in a tall tree only meters from Rt. 15. I then got to see it and shortly thereafter, it started singing again.

The bird was in a tall deciduous tree along with a couple Yellow Warblers and an Audubon's Warbler. It was obviously somewhat larger than the Yellows with no hint of streaking anywhere in the plumage. Its head was a bright, orangey-yellow with a long, stout (for a warbler), black bill and large, black eyes. The color of the head continued down the underparts with a gradual change to a yellow belly with no hint of orange. The undertail coverts were contrastingly white. The back was an unmarked greenish color and the plain wings and the tail were bluish-gray. Individual outer tail feathers had distinct, white spots on the inner webs that were visible from above when the tail was fanned. I could also discern these spots when looking directly up at the bird above me. Its tarsi were black.

The bird sang quite a lot. Its song was composed of a number (6-10) of seemingly identical syllables. It was immediately recognizable to me as the song of Prothonotary, as I have lived much of my life in their breeding range. The bird would repeat its song with only short intervals between renditions, with a few interruptions for the capture and consumption of some juicy morsel from the foliage of the tree in which it was singing. It is interesting to note that in the same woodlot was a Northern Waterthrush and a male MacGillivray's Warbler, so there had obviously been a good flight

Similar species eliminated: Prothonotary Warbler is very difficult to confuse with any other North American bird, given a reasonable look. The color pattern is unmatched and the song is diagnostic (barring mimicry by some other warbler species). The tail pattern is approached only by Hooded Warbler, which would have had at least some darker area on the head, a shorter bill, and pinkish legs. Blue-winged would have shown wingbars, a dark eyeline, a smaller bill, and would have been noticeably smaller than Yellow Warbler. In fact, all other even remotely similar species would show patterns of different color on the head and underparts, streaking on back and/or underparts, or both.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen 100s of Prothonotary Warblers and 100s to 1000s of all similar species in extensive birding in eastern North America.

**Light conditions:** sky was clear with the direct morning sun blocked by the trees of the woodlot in which the bird was residing

**Optical equipment used:** 7x42 Zeiss

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated closest distance was about 18 feet

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** Bonnie Stout (the finder, an experienced birder from Michigan)

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** Bonnie Stout, see above

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** (How is this relevant?) Not photographed

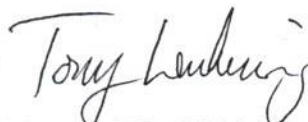
**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

**a) at time of observation:** none

**b) after observation:** none

**Reporting observer:** Tony Leukering

**Signature:**



**Address:** Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Piccadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

**Date report was written:** 6 June 1996 from notes written within a few hours of seeing the bird and without consultation to references; copied from paper original to computerized format on 7 December 1996 with no substantive changes made (just a couple typos corrected, etc.)