

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER

Dendroica fusca

Location: Lake Hasty Campground; Lamar, Bent County, Colorado

Date: May 17, 1997

Background:

Brandon Percival, Bob Dickson and I were birding the trees in the campground below the dam at John Martin Reservoir (the Lake Hasty campground). At about 11:30 a.m. Brandon and I heard a singing warbler near the north side of the campground and pursued it. The song was a very high pitched, thin phrase of varied notes followed by a higher thin trill. It sang frequently with intervals of just a few seconds between songs. The song did not carry far. "see-wee see-ree see-wee seep seep seep zzzzzz". Although we did not recognize the song to species, we knew that it was an unfamiliar eastern warbler. We all saw the bird in full sun and studied it for over 15 minutes. It stayed in elms or locust trees about 15-25' high. I observed the bird from 20' - 50' with B & L Elite 10x42 binoculars.

Description:

The bird was an adult male in breeding plumage. It was quite easy to observe and, although active, it foraged in lower and middle levels of small trees and sometimes sat still enough to observe at length. It was quite small (about 4 1/2" long), slim and short-tailed. Its bill was dark, small, pointed, sharp and thin. It revealed itself to be a brilliant and breathtaking bird. It had a brilliant, bright orange forehead and stripe up through the center of the fore-crown. Its face, chin, throat and upper breast also had a brilliant orange background. The orange breast contrasted sharply with the white belly and whitish undertail coverts. There were lots of clear, black streaks on the sides of the breasts and the flanks. There was an irregular black patch on the face and a black eyeline. There was a tiny orange crescent below the eye. The cap was black, as were the nape, back and wings. There were two yellowish diagonal stripes on the scapulars on the back. It had two distinct white wingbars. The eyes, legs and feet were blackish.

Similar Species:

The small size, slim shape and small, pointed bill indicate a warbler. No other warbler is so bright orange and the white diagonal streaks on the back are diagnostic for this species. The Northern Parula is bluish above and lacks black streaking and many other features of this bird. Cape May Warbler lacks the black face patch and orange crown streak. Kentucky Warbler is plain olive above and does not have white in the wing and lacks flank streaking.

Experience with Species:

I have seen Blackburnian Warbler four times before in Colorado. I have seen male Blackburnians in other states.

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

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