

CFO-ORC FILE # 2001-50ACCEPTED

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD X

rec'd 1/17/02

Species: Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minmus*)**Date:** 3 May 2001 **Number seen:** two **Sex:** unknown **Plumage:** Basic**Locality:** Lamar Community College **Elevation:** about 3600'**Nearest town:** Lamar **County:** Prowers**Time observed:** about 09:40-09:55 MDT**Duration of observation:** about 3 minutes for the first bird, 5 minutes for the second bird

Description: I was birding with two others at Lamar Community College, when I found a Gray-cheeked Thrush (GCTH) near the eastern edge of the woodland, north of the marsh, behind the college. The bird was an obvious *Catharus* thrush (it was spotted underneath, had brown upperparts, and had pinkish legs). My initial look at the bird was obstructed by foliage, but the bird looked as if it lacked the obvious buffy eyering of Swainson's (SWTH). I called to my two compadres to help me confirm my suspicions. However, the bird was quite shy and always seemed to keep some vegetation between us. The bird then flushed and, upon landing, called a few times. Eventually, two birds flushed and then perched in separate places. I got good looks at both of them, but I don't think that either of the other two observers saw the second one. However, the first perched up well and we watched it for some time. The second soon, though, flew off to the north. After the first bird flew off to the south, we continued north and Joe refound the second bird and we were able to study it for some 5 or more minutes. Both birds were very similar in appearance, so I describe them as one, below.

They were cold-colored *Catharus*, being medium brownish on the upperparts, with little change in color from head to tail tip. The auriculars were grayer than the crown and the birds lacked a strong eyering of any color. The eyes were dark and the bills were bicolored - mostly dark but with a pale-based mandible. The malar stripes were black, not the dark brown typical of SWTH. The chin and throat were unmarked white and there was little buffiness around the black spotting on the sides of the breast. The spotting petered out on the lower sides, with the flanks appearing unmarked, though they were obviously grayish. The belly and vent were white. The bird I saw best had very long primary projection, the distance of which was about equal to the length of the longest tertial. There were no buff-tipped greater secondary coverts that I could see, so I could not determine the birds' ages. Once or twice, I saw the wide, pale, mid-wing bar on the underwing that is typical of North American *Catharus*.

Similar species eliminated by description: All other *Catharus* ruled out by call note. SWTH easily eliminated by head pattern and coloration, bill pattern, malar coloration. Bicknell's Thrush is eliminated by lack of an obvious rufescent primary panel, tail coloration, and, possibly, by primary projection. Most Veeries ruled out readily by upperparts coloration and underparts spotting. Those scary grayish Veeries from the Pacific NW are eliminated by bill pattern and call.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e., from perch, in flight, duration): One bird gave about a dozen calls in one bout, and I describe the call as a roughly chevron-shaped (with a long tail), slightly two-parted, longish note roughly transliterated as "seyouuu."

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen in excess of 130 Gray-cheeked Thrushes and 100s to 1000s of the other North American *Catharus*, except for Bicknell's, of which I've seen about 10.

Light conditions: sky overcast

Optical equipment used: Swarovski 8.5x42

Distance, and how estimated: estimated closest distance at 4 meters

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Joe Fontaine and Marshall Iliff

Other observers who saw the bird independently: none?

If photographed, type of equipment and film: I did not photograph

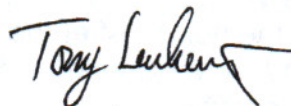
List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



Address: Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: This report was written on 17 January 2002 from notes written about 6 hours after the sighting.

good 5/28

Gray-cheeked Thrush at Lamar Community College, Prowers County, Colorado, 3 May 2001

On 3 May 2001 I birded eastern Colorado with Tony Leukering and Joe Fontaine. After good southerly winds into the evening of 1 May, a cold front swept through the area with winds going northerly by 11:00 p.m. on 1 May. The overcast and rainy conditions overnight 2-3 May had likely prevented any migration. After a good morning at Two Buttes Reservoir, we visited Lamar Community College where migrants were relatively scarce (10 Orange-crowned Warblers, 1 Solitary Sandpiper, 1 Warbling Vireo, 1 female Hooded Warbler, 1 Hermit and 1 Swainson's Thrush). After about 15 minutes of birding, around 9:45 a.m., Tony called out that he had an interesting thrush. Joe and I rushed over and we spent the next 5 minutes trying to get a good look at the bird he suspected of being a Gray-cheeked Thrush. After several minutes of looking in a small brushy area, the bird flushed to a second thicket and began calling, giving definitive Gray-cheeked call notes. Eventually we flushed it out of a small thicket, along with a second *Catharus*, and had good looks at it while perched. It was about 20 ft up and about 50 ft distant. After 2 minutes of observation it flew off to the south in the grove. Tony was able to see both birds and said both were Gray-cheeked, but we never saw where the second one went after Tony's quick view. About 5 minutes later Joe relocated one of the two birds (probably the second individual, as we saw the first individual fly off to the south). That bird sat perched about 4 ft off the ground and 20 ft away, and allowed a close study for our 5 minutes of observation. All observations were made with a Zeiss 10x40 binocular. Skies were overcast and a light drizzle from the morning had ceased by about 7:00 a.m.

The below description is compiled mostly from the second observation. Although I believe my two observations involved two different birds, I never saw both well enough to be personally certain two Gray-cheekeds were present. I did see two *Catharus* though and have no doubt of Tony's identification.

Description:

An obvious *Catharus* thrush, with a brownish back, pale underparts, and extensive spotting on the upper breast. Size and structure was essentially like other *Catharus*, and unlike the chesty and plump appearance of Wood Thrush.

The eye was dark. The bill was mostly dark but was extensively pale in its basal 2/3. The color was close to yellow-orange, and was seen fairly well in the closer view. The legs were dull, dusky pinkish.

The face was very plain in appearance, being mostly dull grayish. There was a thin but easily apparent whitish eyering. There was no pale line connecting the lores and forming "spectacles", as seen on Swainson's Thrush. The lores matched the rest of the face in color. There was no pale area wrapping around the auriculars, although this was specifically looked for. The cheeks were grayish with slightly paler mottling. There were no buffy tones to the cheeks.

The sides of the neck were dull gray-brown as the crown and back. The chin and throat were pale to the malar area. A thin, blackish malar stripe was prominent along the lower edge of the malar feathering. The throat was unmarked whitish. The breast was heavily spotted below the pale throat which set off the pale throat patch prominently. The breast spotting was distinctly blackish. The spots were large, round, and black towards the center of the breast. The spotting on the sides of the breast was smaller, denser, and was dull gray in color, not as blackish as the spotting in the central area of the breast. There was a faint, pale buffy wash across the center of the breast just below the throat. The rest of the breast was plain white below the spotting. The belly was white to the undertail coverts. The flanks were pale and marked by very broad olive-brown streaks.

The back, upperwings, rump, and tail were an entirely uniform dull gray-brown. There were no brighter areas, no areas of contrast, and nothing approaching rusty or reddish. The nape and crown were a similar gray-brown.

Habits:

While perched the bird flicked its wings frequently, but never raised its tail at the same time as Hermit Thrush often does.

Call:

The bird was heard to call 10-15 times. On all occasions the call was a quiet, obvious muted note, and not given at full volume. I often hear this subdued call from migrant thrushes in the east. The call was a high-pitched, burry note that rose sharply in its short first portion before a longer descending section, best described verbally as "see-iouuuu".

Similar species: The field marks observed easily eliminate Wood Thrush. The lack of rusty tones to the wings and tail eliminate Hermit Thrush. Veery was eliminated by the lack of reddish color on the back and the black spotting on the breast. Swainson's Thrush was eliminated by the cold color to the back and wings, the narrow whitish eyering, the lack of a "spectacle" mark, the lack of buffy tones to the cheeks, and the reduced buffy wash across the breast. The distinctive call note is diagnostic and eliminates all other thrushes.

An exception to the above is the recently-split Bicknell's Thrush. In addition to being exceedingly unlikely as a spring vagrant to Colorado (since it breeds in eastern Canada and New England, winters in the Caribbean and migrates entirely east of the Appalachians), I believe the plumage of the bird I observed was not consistent with that species. The bird or birds that I saw in the two views were very cold in color. Both appeared large while Bicknell's is one of the smallest *Catharus*. The bird seen well while perched low was entirely dull gray-brown in color, without stronger reddish tones to the wings or tail. Bicknell's by contrast typically has brighter reddish color on the wings and tail, and is warmer overall. The breast is more extensively buffy. I do not believe lower mandible color is a reliable field mark, though on this bird it did appear more yellowish than pinkish. The very long primary extension is another point against Bicknell's.

Feel free to contact me if there are any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



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Gray-cheeked Thrush
 Larmer Community College,
 3 May 2001 Colorado
 9:45-10:00 a.m.



- Spots on breast were fairly small and sand. Spots were smaller and less intense black as one moved away from the center of the breast
- Swainson's Thrush seen ~5 min before was much darker on back & wings

© Marshall J. Iliff, found first by T. Leukering, also seen by J. Fontaine

Thin bill
w/ pink basal
2/3 to lower mand.

very thin
upper
eye
pinkish
bill

no buff on
fore, auricular
area, has even in
color, no pie markings
Sulphured auriculars

back on even cold
grey-brown, as tail + head

• flicked wings on
tail, white for
• high pitched call
"see-ic-see" 5-10
10-15x, buty
quality.

prominent
white throat
off by thin
black
streak

very buff
buff wash
across chest
in middle
of
spots on white
background

lower breast
belly, + undertail
coverts white

wings
even
in
color,
no reddish
primary bases

keeps
body
dull
pinkish

largest primary
reached tip
at longest
undertail
covert

very long
primary
extension

fully short
tail only
slightly longer
than primary
extension

