GOOD BIRD

The bird of the summer, and the year (and decade!), was the PIPING PLOVER that was found at Reardan Slough on 13 July by Roger Muskat and Thais Bock and was still there on the 16th. It was very lovely but thought-provoking as a displaced individual of a threatened species. At one point it called plaintively and flew off by itself, away from the small sandpipers with which it had been feeding. Its pale form seemed out of place on the dark mud, and we hoped it would find its way back to a good sandy beach somewhere. It was welcomed by all who saw it.

A first Washington record, the Piping is not entirely unexpected in the Northwest, as it has on occasion bred in northeastern Montana and wintered in southern California. A sight record from Manzanita, Oregon, 8 September 1986, is the only other regional report.

On 16 July the slough held a wonderful assortment of shorebirds, including 10 Killdeer, 2 Black-necked Stilts, 4 Am. Avocets, 5 Greater Yellowlegs, 2 Semipalmated, 18 Western, 7 Least and 3 Baird's sandpipers, 1 Short-billed and 6 Long-billed dowitchers, 3 Common Snipes and 16 Wilson's Phalaropes. Many Eared Grebes were present, with downy young of all sizes, and adult and juvenile Black Terns flew about. As startling as the Piping Plover was a lone Trumpeter Swan that flew in and landed at the end of the slough.

NEW BREEDERS

Three species of birds were first found breeding in Washington this year. Acorn Woodpeckers nested at Lyle, Least Flycatchers probably nested near Monroe, and male and female Northern Mockingbirds were repeatedly seen carrying food near the Potholes Reservoir, a sure sign of nesting.

These isolated pairs of breeding birds probably represent only the "tip of the iceberg." Think of how many other pairs of these three species there may be in the state, and contemplate how many pairs of birds of species not known to breed in the state may be out there as well. Least Flycatchers are continually reported, usually only an observation or two of a calling male. Can't we do better at confirming breeding records for this species?

It turns out that a singing Northern Mockingbird was seen some years ago in July in the same area as the pair was found this year. Have they nested there for some time?

A pair of Gray Flycatchers was found on 16 July in an open ponderosa pine forest east of Wilbur in Lincoln County. This is well east of the known range of the species in the state. Do they occur throughout that area?

The number of undiscovered bird populations—particularly breeders—in Washington is mind-boggling. Let's get out there and discover them!

GOOD BIRDING

Just a glance at the DeLorme atlas shows one that parts of eastern Washington are full of potholes, many of them probably similar enough to Reardan Slough to attract the diversity of shorebirds that have been recorded at that birding hotspot. How many of them are surveyed regularly? How many of them are ever scrutinized? Sewage ponds at Othello and Grandview have been exciting recently for the number of shorebirds and other water birds, but there must be many other such places in our arid interior.

How about a concerted effort to find more of those interior shorebirds this fall? How common are juvenile Stilt and Semipalmated sandpipers in August and September? How many Short-billed Dowitchers are mixed in the flocks of Long-billed? How long do avocets, stilts and phalaropes hang around?

NEXT MEETING

There will be no monthly meetings in July and August, but be sure to join us for the annual meeting in September at Grays Harbor. See inside for the registration form.
The Western Flycatcher was split by the AOU in 1989 into two species, the Pacific-slope Flycatcher (Empidonax difficilis) and the Cordilleran Flycatcher (E. occidentalis) on the basis of research by Ned K. Johnson and his colleagues. According to Johnson the Pacific-slope Flycatcher breeds at low elevations west of the Cascades in Washington (but east of the Cascades in the Okanogan Valley of British Columbia a short distance north of the border), while the Cordilleran breeds in southeastern Washington, with specific records from Whitman and Columbia counties.

Johnson found no conclusive evidence of breeding by either species elsewhere in the state. However, I have found Western Flycatchers of one sort or another commonly during the nesting season virtually throughout eastern Washington and east to the Flathead Valley in Montana. Furthermore, many Westerns have been reported by Breeding Bird Atlas volunteers along the eastern base of the Cascades. In short, the "wide gap" between the breeding ranges of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers that Johnson presumed to exist in the Pacific Northwest does not exist, suggesting that the two forms may be in contact over a wide area as yet little studied.

Johnson claimed that these two forms are "strongly differentiated in size, color, voice, and preferred habitat." This claim is exaggerated. Johnson's data indicate only a weak contrast in color (Cordilleran slightly brighter perhaps), a sharp contrast in average size (the Cordilleran larger, but with substantial overlap), and Cordilleran populations in our region "falling neatly between the coastal series and...far-interior samples" in their vocalizations. In particular, Johnson suggested that Cordillerans in our region might exhibit Pacific-slope male position notes, the most characteristic and frequently heard note of the Western Flycatcher. Finally, Cordilleran Flycatchers in our region nest at lower elevations than is typical of central Rocky Mountain birds and nest in forest types identical to those in which Pacific-slope Flycatchers nest east of the Cascade crest. In short, the split leaves many questions unanswered with respect to the situation in Washington state and vicinity.

I was skeptical of Johnson's claim that the Cordilleran Flycatcher occurred in Washington and even doubted the wisdom of the split (I still believe it was premature). So in hopes of helping clarify the local situation, and following an exchange of letters with Ned Johnson, I acquired a decent cassette recorder (Marantz PMD-221) and microphone (Sennheiser ME-88/K-3U with 13" parabolic reflector) and set out to record as many vocalizing Western Flycatchers in eastern Washington as I could. I am in the process of analyzing these recordings, but here is a summary of my findings to date.

First, there is little room for doubt that the common nesting species all along the eastern base of the Cascades from the east end of the Columbia Gorge north to the Canadian border (and beyond) is the Pacific-slope Flycatcher. I have a good recording of one bird giving the full song as well as male position notes from Wenas Creek on 27 May 1990. I heard at least six males calling along a two-mile stretch of the North Fork above the campground and heard of five more calling males a few miles up the Dry Creek Fork above the campground the same weekend. On 2-3 June, Dennis Paulson's bird class found two pairs building nests in Manastash Canyon; males gave Pacific-slope calls. All of these birds were in riparian habitat (typically dominated by alder) near the lower edge of timber at elevations between 2300 and 2900 feet. The song and call notes I recorded in this area are typical of Pacific-slope Flycatchers in all respects. In particular, the male position note is an unbroken "sinusoidal" whistle rising sharply at the end, and the third song syllable is low-high.

On 13 June I recorded two Pacific-slope Flycatchers just west of Snoqualmie Pass in alder-Douglas fir associations quite similar to the habitat along Wenas Creek but at 1500 feet. I heard a calling male along the Teanaway River north of Cle Elum that evening but was unable to get close enough to record it. The next morning, however, I found several Westerns on Liberty Creek at and just below the townsite of Meaghersville. The full song and calls of one of these individuals are typical Pacific-slope. These birds were at about 2600 feet in streamside alder and cottonwood.

The only suggestion that the situation in the Cascades might be more complex is the sighting of a bird with Cordilleran Flycatcher calls near Naches in May 1989 by Tom Hahn. He was unable to locate it on subsequent visits. This could indicate that Cordilleran may turn up here in migration or even that they may nest sparingly.

East of the Cascades, Richard Cannings and Ned Johnson have both documented singing Pacific-slope Flycatchers in Okanogan County, Washington, east of the Okanagan River. From farther south, Johnson had published a sonogram of an alleged Cordilleran Flycatcher from along the Palouse River in Whitman County that seemed clearly intermediate to my eye. So next I slipped out for a quick trip to southeastern Washington.

Early on 23 June I headed east out of Colfax for Kamiak Butte, one site known to have Western Flycatchers nesting. As I passed the Glenwood Station Rd. junction at the Clear Creek bridge about five miles east of Colfax I heard a loud male position note. The bird called regularly from a cottonwood at the bridge over the creek and from a nearby ponderosa pine. Both the note and habitat suggested Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and I got excellent recordings.

Then I drove north down Clear Creek to the North Fork of the Palouse River and turned west along the north side of the river back toward Colfax. I stopped at a point overlooking a nice deciduous riparian stand, hoping to hear a Western by the river. Instead I heard one in full song on the hillside behind me, a steep, dry, southeast-facing slope with a sparse growth of ponderosa pine. After struggling up the brushy slope, I managed to get in position to record the bird up close. It sounded odd. Played back at half speed, the position note was obviously two-parted and not infrequently substituted for the first song syllable.
The third song syllable was more complex than and different in quality from what I had previously heard and was high-low. The second syllable of the song seemed less sharp and was often repeated 3-6 times in a row. It seemed I had found my first Washington Cordilleran Flycatcher.

Back along Clear Creek, near the first sighting, I heard another male position note from down near the creek. I pulled off to record it and discovered the bird with a large insect in its beak. It shortly flew into the metal framework of a battered silo roof someone had discarded below the road and was joined by the female, also with an insect. The male's call note sounded like the first I had recorded, unbroken, like a Pacific-slope Flycatcher.

I then proceeded to Kamiak Butte, my original destination, and set out to climb to the summit. The trail starts in a predominantly ponderosa pine forest where Hammond's Flycatchers are conspicuous. It was midday, with little hope of hearing birds in full song. However, just below the summit in dense Douglas fir forest I heard a singing bird that exhibited all the peculiarities of the suspected Cordilleran I had just found along the Palouse River. The habitat was clearly forested slope rather than riparian.

I now have sonagrams of these four individuals, and they clearly support my first impressions: the two singing birds are clearly Cordilleran on the basis of both song and male position note. These two also clearly selected non-riparian habitats on steep, wooded slopes (though in the first instance within earshot of the riparian zone). Both also were still in full song, despite the late hour. By contrast, the two Clear Creek birds with Pacific-slope male position notes seemed to favor deciduous riparian trees when available and foraged in the creek bottom. One was paired and feeding young, while the other did not sing, suggesting that it might also have had a mate.

This sample is clearly small and as yet inconclusive. However, one feasible hypothesis is that Cordilleran and Pacific-slope flycatchers are sympatric in southeastern Washington (as they appear to be in northern California), with isolation maintained by a combination of subtle vocal clues, contrasting habitat preferences, and perhaps asynchronous nesting periods. In particular, if Cordilleran arrives several weeks later than Pacific-slope here, opportunities for interbreeding would be sharply reduced.

Mixed pairs and hybrids may well be discovered. Birds singing like Cordilleran but with Pacific-slope style male position notes might be hybrids, for example. Likewise birds with atypical combinations of songs and habitat preferences could be hybrids.

My next expedition will be to the Pend Oreille. I have heard Western Flycatchers there during the past two years that sounded just like coastal birds, and that were in deciduous riparian forest. Likely these were Pacific-slope Flycatchers. How far east does that species extend? And how far north in eastern Washington, Idaho, and western Montana do Cordillerans extend?

One caution: I believe it is essential to tape-record any out-of-range individuals of this group, preferably both male position notes and full songs. Careful notes on habitat and breeding status are also essential. With such data, I believe we as amateur observers can contribute to the clarification of issues of substantial scientific and theoretical interest.

Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.
1990 ANNUAL MEETING - SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER
06:30 - 16:00. Pelagic trip off Westport. To register for this trip, contact Terry Wahl at 3041 Eldridge Ave., Bellingham, WA 98225 (206) 733-8255.

18:00 - 21:00. Registration and check-in at the Nordic Inn. Detailed agenda will be available at registration.

SATURDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER
06:00 - 06:30. Breakfast at the Nordic Inn.

07:00 - 13:00. Field trips to the Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay areas, leaving from the Nordic Inn.

14:30 - 17:30. Meeting at the Nordic Inn, with talks on shorebirds by Dennis Paulson and Steve Herman, record-keeping by Phil Mattocks, etc.

18:00 - 19:00. Social hour and no-host bar.

19:00 - 21:30. Banquet and speaker—Linda Feltner on the process of creating a bird print.

SUNDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER
06:00 - 06:30. Breakfast at the Nordic Inn.

07:00 - 13:00. Field trips to the Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay areas, leaving from the Nordic Inn.
REGISTRATION FORM
WOS ANNUAL MEETING
14-16 September 1990
Nordic Inn, Aberdeen, WA

Name(s)

Mailing Address
City State/Prov Zip
Phone

Registration Fees:

- __ $20 if WOS member ($15 if you register by 5 August postmark), $5 for member's spouse
- __ $30 if nonmember, includes one year membership in WOS ($25 if you register by 5 August postmark), $5 for spouse
- __ $10 for student

- === REGISTRATION TOTAL ENCLOSED

Lodging and food at the Nordic Inn (per person basis):

- __ $66 Regular double room Fri./Sat. nights, Sat. night banquet, Sat./Sun. breakfasts
- __ $76 Same but queen-sized bed
- __ $91 Regular single room Fri./Sat. nights, Sat. night banquet, Sat./Sun. breakfasts
- __ $112 Same but queen-sized bed
- __ $26 Food only, Sat. night banquet and Sat./Sun. breakfasts
- __ $13 Banquet only

- === FOOD AND LODGING TOTAL ENCLOSED

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO WASHINGTON ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
SEND REGISTRATION FORMS AND MONEY TO
Bill Tweit
P. O. Box 1271, Olympia, WA 98507
(206) 754-7098

To ensure obtaining a room, register by 20 August. There are a limited number of single and non-smoking rooms, so register early if you prefer them. Please indicate with whom you would like to share a room, if they are not also registering on this form.

Are you interested in: a non-smoking room? ____________ vegetarian meals? ____________
BUOYED by the help of the Clay-colored Sparrow, Rustic Bunting, White-throated and Harris’ sparrows, Snow Bunting, Glaucous Gull, Snowy Owl and Bohemian Waxwing by the end of January, Georgia and I decided to make a serious run for a Big Year for the state. It meant planning ahead for Sage, Spruce and Sharp-tailed grouse, Sandhill Crane, Ferruginous Hawk, White-winged Crossbill and other species. One cannot just wander around, trusting to luck, hoping various birds make themselves known. Certain species will be available at certain times in certain places. Be there then, or else assemble a set of zeros. Luck and serendipity play a part in the results, but the more uncommon species require planning, patience and persistence. Many species require return trips.

One of our best days targeted four species. It entailed driving a loop through White Pass, over the bumpy Umtanum Road and back over Snoqualmie Pass. The date—17 June. A side trip up Smith Creek Road out of Packwood produced several Hermit Warblers. Bear Canyon, above the Tieton River, brought us Canyon Wrens, seemingly fewer in 1989 than in previous years. The Hog-ranch Road above Wenatche Camp showed us a close, nestling pair of Gray Flycatchers. A winding trip high up the mountain on a logging road, against the bottom of the clouds, produced a pair of Black Swifts at Snoqualmie Pass. But many such trips came up blank. The Green-tailed Towhee and Upland Sandpiper were never found. It took four tries to nail down the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. We missed the Ruff because we were in eastern Washington looking for other species.

In addition to the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, other species were new for our state list: Flammulated Owl, Lesser Goldfinch, Acorn Woodpecker, Boreal Owl and Little Blue Heron. The one-time state list, and we decided to avoid the ravages of a pelagic trip, I picked up the Laysan Albatross.

We saw half the species by mid March, three-fourths by 22 May and 300 by the end of August. That left us four months to equal Bill Tweit’s 337. But the law of diminishing returns set in. There were fewer and fewer choices available, and a strong probability that many would not make an appearance at all. We began to ask friends around the state to watch for certain species. The hotline number got a workout. When we heard from an informant, we dashed madly to the location. We spent more days in the field and in December touched home base only briefly. A Hooded Warbler in Pullman; a Yellow-billed Leon in the boat harbor at Ocean Shores; Rosy Finches at Sun Lakes; a Cattle Egret spending its last days in a vacant lot in Seattle; a Gyrfalcon at the Palix River boat ramp; a Swamp Sparrow along Powell Road north of Grays Harbor; and, on the last day, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker near Ellensburg. The tally: 334 for Georgia and 333 for me. Rest easy, Bill!

We spent 133 days in the field, a total of 1,380 hours of birding time, and drove 30,000 miles in the process. We did not keep track of the costs because we really didn’t want to know. It was a good effort, but we don’t anticipate doing it again—there are many other things to get done and less time to do them. Georgia remains rather unimpressed by it all. I welcomed the chance to rest up and work on other things. What did she do on her first free day of the New Year?

She went birding!

10500 Interlaaken Dr. SW
Tacoma, WA 98498

NEW FIELD CARDS

Seattle Audubon Society is no longer publishing and distributing the Field Card of Washington Birds. The Washington Bird Records Committee has compiled a new list, and WOS will be distributing it. The first run of 2,000 cards is complete and is being offered at a wholesale rate of 20¢ each for orders of 25 or more. Shipping costs (book rate) will be included in any order. Send requests to Frederick Bird, 1249 NE 92nd St., Seattle, WA 98115.

The cards can also be purchased at WOS meetings for 25¢ each. When we have sold them all, we will revise the list and print another batch.