

19-90-19

SPECIES: AMERICAN WOODCOCK (*Scolopax minor*)

LOCATION: SUNSHINE CANYON, BOULDER COLORADO.

DATE: NOVEMBER 28 & 30, 1990.

JOHN PRATHER

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CONDITIONS: Both days were clear and sunny with cool temperatures and light winds. Light conditions were very good, either direct sunlight in open areas or light shadows under the trees in the creek bed. The bird was observed for a duration of only a few seconds on each occasion and was only seen by eye, not with optical equipment.

HABITAT: The area in which the bird was seen was a short stretch of creek bed about 200 yards long at the base of Sunshine Canyon. A shallow creek, fed by seepage from several small springs, runs along the bottom of the canyon. The creek bed itself is lightly wooded with thick areas of brush and deadwood interspersed along the banks. Ground cover consists of a thick mat of leaves, twigs, and grasses.

BEHAVIOR: The bird in question was flushed a total of three times, twice on the 28th and once on the 30th. On all occasions the bird was flushed from areas of moderate cover near the edge of the creek. On two occasions the bird directly away from me and once it flew directly overhead. The bird's flight was rapid and low to the ground, and the bird dodged behind cover as soon as possible after taking off. At no time was the bird observed on the ground although it did not fly unless approached quite closely (2-8 ft.).

DESCRIPTION: Overall this bird appeared very chunky, with a short tail and broad, rounded wings. The underparts, including the throat, breast, belly, flanks and undertail coverts, were completely buff in color. This color ranged from bright buff on the flanks and undertail coverts to cream in the center of the belly and breast. The bill was long and pale in coloration. The back of the bird was mainly black, divided by several stripes of buff and rust. The rump and uppertail coverts were bright buff with strong orange-rust overtones. The rump and lower back appeared to be blotched with spots of black. The tail was black with a thin band of white at the terminal end. The wings were of overall brownish color. The top and sides of the head were not seen. The bird flew with very fast wingbeats and the wings made a sort of twittering whistle while the bird was in flight. The bird appeared to be approximately the size of a robin.

CONCLUSION: Only a few other species I can think of fit any of the characteristics of this bird. Northern Bobwhite, with which I am very familiar, is a larger bird with a short bill and a much darker and browner plumage overall. American Robin and Common Flicker are common in the area and feed on the ground, but also have short bills and duller plumage. The bird in question did not show any of the field marks characteristic of these species. Common Snipe is the most likely alternate possibility. This bird should have browner plumage, more pointed wings, and white underparts.

with some dark spotting and banding, however. It is also unlikely that a snipe would be found in this habitat.

OBSERVERS:

John Prather and Peter Gent (Nov. 30th only)

Signed: John Prather