

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

CFO-ORC FILE # 2002-48

ACCEPTED

NEW STATE RECORD _____ UNUSUAL RECORD X

Species: Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*)

Date: 12 May 2002

Number seen: one

Sex: ?

Plumage: Basic

Locality: banding station grove, Chico Basin Ranch

Elevation: ~5200'

Nearest town: Hanover

County: El Paso

Time observed: ~08:15

Duration of observation: ~15 seconds

Description: While helping out at the banding station at Chico Basin Ranch, Bill Schmoker asked me to look at a *Catharus* thrush that he thought might be a Gray-cheeked Creeper that he had seen on the ground near one of the mist nets. He managed to show me the bird and it was, indeed, a Gray-cheeked Thrush. We were trying to point it out to others there, but shortly after I located it, the bird flew over the net and out of sight, never to be seen again.

The bird was an obvious *Catharus* thrush (gray-brown above, white below, with dark spotting on the chest walking on pink legs on the ground) with no strong eye ring and no obvious rufous in the plumage. The bird was the same gray-brown color above from the base of the bill to the tail, which may have been slightly warmer-colored, but in the shade it was difficult to discern. The wings were the same color as the back with no obvious rufous panel in the primaries. The wings were very long with the wingtips extending well past the uppertail coverts. The face was plain, with a faint gray eye ring and gray lores. The auriculars were also gray, but darker than either the eye ring or the lores, and this coloration contrasted rather noticeably with the nape and crown.

The chin and throat were white centrally with obvious black lateral throat stripes. The spotting on the chest was blackish and quite distinct. Underneath the spots was a pale tawny wash limited to the sides of the chest and much less obvious than on the many Swainson's Thrushes that we saw before and after the Gray-cheeked.

Similar species eliminated: Swainson's Thrush (of which there were probably >100 present that day) is ruled out by the lack of a strong buff eye ring, the gray auriculars, and the black (not very dark brown), lateral throat stripes. Hermit Thrush is eliminated by the lack of contrastingly colored tail, primary panel, and auricular patch, and by not doing the typical tail jerk of that species. Veery is ruled out by the strong spotting underneath, the black lateral throat stripes, and the facial pattern. Bicknell's Thrush is not certainly eliminated, except by probability. However, many/most Bicknell's can be ruled out by the lack of strongly contrasting tail and primary panel. Finally, this bird was at least as big as the Swainson's Thrushes that we had been seeing, thus eliminating most other Bicknell's Thrushes.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): none heard

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen >150 Gray-cheeked Thrushes, 100s of Veeries, and 1000s of Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes. I have also seen 5-10 Bicknell's Thrushes (mostly in the hand).

Light conditions: sun in front and to my right, but blocked by a large stand of cottonwoods, elms, and olives

Optical equipment used: Swarovski 8.5x42

Distance, and how estimated: closest estimated approach of about 5 meters

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Bill Schmoker

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 80603

Date report was written: Written on 14 January 2004 from notes that I wrote the evening of the sighting

2002-48

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

(Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

Each table cell will automatically enlarge as you type!

CFO-RC FILE X:

RESULTS:Species:(Common Name) **Gray-cheeked Thrush**(Scientific Name) *Catharus minimus*

Date(s) of occurrence: 5/12/02

Number of birds seen: 1

Sex: ?

Plumage: Adult

Exact location: Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Chico Basin Ranch Banding Station

County: El Paso

Nearest town: Hanover

Elevation: ~ 5100 feet

Length of observation: Two times, about one or two minute each.

Time(s) of observation: Approx. 6 p.m.

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: Tony Leukering

Other Observers who independently saw the bird(s): Unknown at time of report.

Light Conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s); position: Light conditions were good. Bird was in well-lit forest providing even lighting.

Optical equipment used: Minox 8.5X42 binoculars

Distance from bird(s) (estimated unless otherwise noted): 22 meters at closest (measured with laser rangefinder)

Was bird(s) photographed? no

If so, have you submitted photos?

Who took the photographs?

Describe the general and specific habitat in which the bird(s) occurred: Isolated patch of deciduous trees (elms, cottonwoods, Russian olives, etc.) surrounded by shortgrass prairie, sage, and cholla.

Describe the bird's behavior (flying, feeding, habits, behaviors used in identifying the Species or in supporting the identification): The bird was foraging in the leaf litter and perching on a large exposed root. It was in the company of many other thrushes (mainly Swainson's but also Hermit Thrush, Veery, and American Robins), warblers, and other migrant passerines taking advantage of the oasis of woods and the abundant crop of miller moths. The large number of thrushes present apparently put down in this migrant trap to wait out a cold front and the accompanying windy, damp weather. The bird eventually flushed and I didn't re-find it.

Describe the bird in detail. This is the most important part of this report. Include the overall size and shape and how you placed the bird in the general group that you did. Give complete details of plumage, including head, throat, undersides, nape, back, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird(s). Describe other important details, such as color and shape of bill, legs, eye, (etc.) that were important in making the identification. (Fill out this portion even if photographs are submitted; you may attach additional sheets, drawings, field sketches or copy field notes): This bird was obviously a *Catharus* thrush, comparing with the dozens of Swainson's Thrushes, several Hermit Thrushes, and two Veerys seen in the woods near the banding station (many caught and banded) that day. In contrast with the Swainson's Thrushes nearby, it appeared to have more gray on the face that contrasted with its back, a more pronounced light border below and behind the cheek, a complete lack of buffy tones on the face, and a more pronounced malar stripe. All of the birds flushed into deeper cover before more observations could be made, but about 10 minutes later the thrush in question returned, this time closer (22 meters away, measured later with a laser rangefinder provided for bird monitoring training.) It stood up on an exposed thick root, allowing a clear profile look. I mentioned the bird to Tony Leukering, who was banding a few meters away. He called "Gray-cheeked Thrush," prompting me to make a more detailed observation. I could see the gray, plain facial pattern that contrasted with the back and nape, the lack of any facial buffy tones seen on nearby Swainson's Thrushes, and a well defined light cheek border below and behind the gray cheek. It lacked the buffy spectacles seen on the Swainson's Thrushes as well. The bird lacked the white spectacles and reddish tail of a Hermit Thrush, instead showing about the same color from the wings and primaries through the tail. It also had a dark malar stripe that blended into the dense spots on its breast. The effect of the dark malar stripe, gray cheeks, and poorly defined eye-ring made it stand out among the other *Catharus* thrushes seen that day.

Describe bird's call or song: Not heard.

Discuss similar species and how you eliminated them: As mentioned above, the Gray-cheeked thrush contrasted with the Swainson's Thrushes present by lacking buffy tones on the face, lacking a buffy eye-ring, and having more dense black spotting on the breast. It gave the impression of more cold contrast overall in the face and breast than the warmer, more blended tones of the Swainson's Thrushes around. It also contrasted with the Hermit's Thrushes in the grove by lacking their white spectacles, redder tail, and clearly isolated black spots on their breasts. The lighter cheek border was also more extensive than the Hermit Thrushes, and the malar stripe appeared to be more distinctive, although this could have been due to the effect of the more prominent cheek-stripe above and the dense dark spots that blended in with it from below.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? This is the first Gray-cheeked Thrush I've seen.

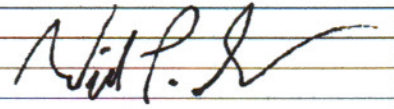
List books, guides, recordings or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation):
When I noticed the different-looking thrush I alerted Tony Leukering, who identified it on the spot as a Gray-checked Thrush. After the observation I consulted The Sibley Guide To Birds to compare the field marks I had seen.

This report is from notes made during and after observation.

Date of written report: 5/16/02

Reporting observer: William P. Schmoker

Signature:



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