

OREGON JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis oregonus* group) IN PASCO COUNTY: FIRST FLORIDA RECORD, AND FIRST SUMMER RECORD OF ANY JUNCO IN FLORIDA

BILL PRANTY¹, DAVID GAGNE², AND GAIL A. DETERRA³
¹8515 Village Mill Row, Bayonet Point, Florida

E-mail: billpranty@hotmail.com

²6046 Concordia Drive, New Port Richey, Florida 34653

³2974 Shannon Circle, Palm Harbor, Florida 34684

On 30 June 2014, we discovered and photographed an “Oregon Junco”—a Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) of the western *oreganus* group, perhaps *J. h. montanus* (Figs. 1–2)—at North Anclote Bar, Pasco County, Florida (28° 13' 58.15" N, 82° 50' 24.24" W). The junco represents the first record in Florida of an “Oregon” Junco, and the first record of any junco during summer. The weather was hot (about 90° F), sunny, and breezy, and the sky was mostly clear. Accessible solely by private boat or Florida Park Service boat, North Anclote Bar is the northernmost island of Anclote Key Preserve State Park. Measured with Google Earth (image date, 17 January 2014), North Anclote Bar is 1.0 km long and about 100 m across at its widest point, but its size and shape change frequently. During our visit, on a Monday, there were fewer than 30 people and 10 boats on the island.

At about 1105 hours, DG noticed a small passerine flying south about 2.5 m above the ground and about 10 m east of us. Given the scarcity of vegetated habitats farther north on the island, it is possible that we discovered the bird as it made landfall, perhaps after having crossed the Gulf of Mexico. The bird continued flying until it perched at the top of a 2.5-m tall mangrove about 60 m southeast of us. Through his telescope, DG identified the bird as a junco, which then flew 30 m farther south to a dense Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) shrub. Over the next 35 minutes, the junco remained on or close to the ground in the pepper shrub, and we glimpsed it sporadically. At one point, the junco flew northwest toward a white mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*), but was repelled midair by a male Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). At 1142 hours, the junco again flew northwest to the white mangrove shrub, successfully reaching it, and after a few minutes perched in the open, where we were able to observe it closely



Figures 1 and 2. Second-year male “Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco perched in a white mangrove at North Anclote Bar, Anclote Key Preserve State Park, Pasco County, 30 June 2014. Photographs by Gail A. Deterra. These images represent the first record in Florida of an “Oregon” Junco and the first record of any junco in the state during summer. Based on its plumage and its presence in Florida, the junco was suggested to be a member of the migratory subspecies *montanus*, which breeds from central British Columbia and southwestern Alberta to eastern Oregon, western Idaho, and western Montana. The junco’s presence in Florida during June, while highly unusual, is not unprecedented for western-breeding passerines; records of Western Wood-Pewee, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Varied Bunting have also occurred in the state during the month.

In Fig. 1, the buffy-brown flanks are just visible to the right of the shoulder. The flank color, together with the blackish head and strong contrast with the brown back, rule out all other junco forms.

for 20 seconds and to photograph it (e.g., Figs. 1–2). Because the junco appeared to be exhausted and heat-stressed (e.g., was often observed gaping), we left it alone once we had obtained satisfactory images. At 1150 hours, as we were departing the island, the junco flew past us in good light, providing excellent views. At no time did we hear the junco vocalize.

Description.—When the junco was in flight and at a distance of about 5 m, BP estimated its length to be roughly comparable to that of an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), or perhaps 16–17 cm in length; DG estimated the junco to be roughly 15 cm in length. When chased by the Red-winged Blackbird, the junco was noticeably smaller but not hugely so. The junco was slender with a round head, a conical bill, and a long, slightly notched tail. When perched, it appeared rather long-legged. The head was wholly blackish with no darker pattern visible on the face. The back was brown and the rump and tail were gray; the bold white outer rectrices were especially conspicuous when the junco was in flight. The wings were grayish with the tertials broadly edged with pale on their inner surfaces. Although not clearly shown in any of our photographs, the junco had a blackish upper breast, buffy-brown flanks, and whitish lower breast, belly, and vent. Except for the dark irides, the bare parts were pale pink.

Junco taxonomy and identification.—The Dark-eyed Junco is composed of 14 subspecies in four groups: the Slate-colored group (subspecies *carolinensis*, *cismontanus*, and *hyemalis*) of northern and eastern North America; the Oregon group (subspecies *mearnsi*, *montanus*, *oreganus*, *pinosus*, *pontilis*, *shufeldti*, *thurberi*, and *townsendi*) of western North America; the Gray-headed group (subspecies *caniceps* and *dorsalis*) of the southern Rockies; and the White-winged group (subspecies *aikeni*) of the Black Hills and eastern Rockies (Nolan et al. 2002, Chesser et al. 2014). Two other Dark-eyed Junco forms may merit recognition as groups: *mearnsi* (“Pink-sided” Junco) of the Oregon group; and *dorsalis* (“Red-backed” Junco) of the Gray-headed group (Chesser et al. 2014). Additionally, several authorities, including Rising (1996) and Nolan et al. (2002), consider *cismontanus*, which breeds in the Canadian Rockies and winters widely, to represent intergrades between the Slate-colored and Oregon groups; these authorities use the English name of “Cassiar” Junco without inclusion of a scientific trinomial.

Identification of the Pasco County junco.—The identification of the North Anclote Bar passerine as a junco is straightforward, considering its generally terrestrial behavior, size and shape, pink conical bill, and relatively simple plumage pattern with white outer rectrices. The identification of the junco to subspecies—or even group—is more problematic, owing to extensive plumage variation, including

intergrades among and between groups. For confirmation that the junco represented an individual of the Oregon group, we posted our photographs to the “ID Frontiers” listserv <listserv.ksu.edu/archives/birdw01.html> and we emailed our images to other authorities. We received comments from 11 individuals (see Acknowledgments), all of whom agreed that the Pasco County junco was an “Oregon” Junco, ruling out all other forms, including “Cassiar,” “Pink-sided,” and “Slate-colored” juncos.

Other juncos share some plumage features of the Pasco County individual, but the *combination* of blackish head contrasting sharply with the brown back and with the buffy-brown flanks is diagnostic of “Oregon” Junco. Many “Cassiar” Juncos share the blackish head—all other juncos have gray or gray-brown heads, often with conspicuous blackish facial patches—but the flanks are gray or gray-buff; also, the back is often gray and shows less contrast with the head. “Pink-sided” Junco shares the pinkish or buffy flanks but the head is gray with a black face.

Alvaro Jaramillo, Michael Price, Peter Pyle, and David Sibley identified the junco as a male, and Pyle and Ted Floyd aged it as an immature (e.g., in its second calendar year). Pyle (in litt., 9 July 2014) offered extensive comments on its age and sex: “Female Oregon Juncos are duller and browner or grayer in the head than this, without the sharp contrast between the head and back. I would not even expect the best of adult females to look like this, certainly not second-year females. On sum it’s a second-year due to the molt limits in the tertials, the browner and more worn looking primary coverts, the brown and pointed outer primaries, and the worn-looking rectrices. It is thus a second-year male, and the head plumage is perfect for this, being slightly less bold and clean than after-second-year males show.” Based on its plumage and its non-sedentary behavior (as evidenced by its appearance in Florida), Floyd and Pyle suggested that the Pasco County junco was an individual of the migratory subspecies *montanus* (referred to as *shufeldti* by Pyle 1997), which breeds in mountains from central interior British Columbia and southwestern Alberta to eastern Oregon, western Idaho, and western Montana (Rising 1996, Nolan et al. 2002).

Status of Dark-eyed Juncos in Florida.—In Florida, the Dark-eyed Junco is a migrant and winter resident in the Panhandle and extreme northern peninsula, considered irregular by Robertson and Woolfenden (1992) and Stevenson and Anderson (1994) and regular by Greenlaw et al. (2014); it is a very rare and irregular visitor as far south as the Keys. Stevenson and Anderson (1994:659–660, 709) list the range of photographic or specimen records as 17 October–3 March, with accepted reports extending this range to 6 October–12

April. Stevenson and Anderson (1994) questioned other reports as early as 30 August and as late as 8 May. Two post-1994 photographic records provide later spring dates, with single “Slate-colored” Juncos at Garden Key, Dry Tortugas National Park, Monroe County, 16 April 1995 (Pranty 1996; K. Karlson, BPA 7291) and Wesley Chapel, Pasco County, 29 April 2012 (Pranty 2012; K. Tracey, BPA 2423). Stevenson and Anderson (1994) state that all junco specimens from Florida refer to *J. h. hyemalis* except for one *J. h. cismontanus* felled by the WCTV tower, Leon County, 5 December 1955 (Tall Timbers Research Station 2165). Through courtesy of Jim Cox, we catalogued three photographs (BPA 8536a–c) of this specimen, a female of undetermined age, into Pranty’s personal archive. The specimen has gray upperparts, breast, and flanks with light brown tinges throughout, and the remainder of the underparts white. There is no contrast between the head and back and no darker face.

Reports of “Oregon,” “Pink-sided,” and “White-winged” juncos exist from Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994, FOS Field Observations Committee reports), but no archived photographs or written details are known to exist for any of these, some of which may instead refer to “Cassiar” Juncos. Thus, the “Oregon” Junco that we photographed at North Anclote Bar, Pasco County, on 30 June 2014 represents the first record for Florida. It is also the first report and record of any junco in the state during summer. We have archived our photographs into Pranty’s personal archive, with catalog numbers BPA 8512a–c (Deterra) and BPA 8513a–e (Pranty).

The occurrence of a western passerine such as an “Oregon” Junco in Florida during June, although certainly unusual, is not unprecedented. Three other western-breeding passerines that represented first Florida records were also found in the state during the same month—Western Wood-Pewee (*Contopus sordidulus*) west of Archbold Biological Station, Highlands County, 19 June 1995 (Woolfenden et al. 1996); Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) at Islamorada, Monroe County, 20 June 1990 (Hoffman et al. 1991); and Varied Bunting (*Passerina versicolor*) at Siesta Key, Sarasota County, 1 June 2005 (Woolfenden and van Deventer 2006).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For commenting on our photographs, we thank Cameron Cox, Elias Elias, Ted Floyd, Jon Greenlaw, Richard Hoyer, Alvaro Jaramillo, Ed Kwater, Tony Leukering, Michael Price, Peter Pyle, and David Sibley. Peter Pyle especially provided detailed commentary. Jim Cox graciously provided photographs of the *cismontanus* specimen, and Lyn Atherton, Kevin Karlson, John Murphy, and Don Robinson kindly responded to other queries. Valeri Ponzo provided critical support to BP. Jon S. Greenlaw, Ted Floyd, and Nathan Pieplow improved drafts of the manuscript.

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