

Siberian Rubythroat: A Species New to Canada

by

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On 26 December 1983, M.A.W.L. found a small bird dead in front of her farmhouse near Hornby, Halton Regional Municipality, Ontario. The bird was lying beside a car which had just arrived from Brampton, Ontario; it is possible that it had been struck by this vehicle at some location en route and had fallen off when the car pulled up in front of her house.

The bird was unfamiliar to her but using the National Geographic Field Guide (Scott 1983), she tentatively identified it as a male Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*). On 27 December the bird was shown to D.B. and M.L.W., who confirmed the identification. The specimen was passed on to the Royal Ontario Museum (R.O.M.) (No. 148368), in which collection it is now permanently housed.

Description

The bird appeared to be an adult male, with a prominent white eye stripe, a white moustache stripe edged with black below and a brilliant shining ruby-red throat.



PHOTO: DAVID BREWER

Siberian Rubythroat, adult male

Since the specimen was in hand, a detailed description was not taken. The weight was 17.2 g.

On preparation, the bird was found to have a fully ossified skull, no fat and testes which measured 2×1 mm. The latter were in a poor state of preservation but possibly indicated a bird older than hatching year. The bird was missing some feathers from the lower back, consistent with the theory that it had been struck by a fast moving vehicle.

Distribution of the Species

The Siberian Rubythroat (also referred to variously and confusingly in the English-language

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literature as Eurasian Rubythroat, Rubythroat, Ruby-throated Warbler and Red-necked Nightingale), breeds primarily in Asiatic Russia, from about 55° E to the Pacific Ocean (Flint *et al.* 1966). It is largely a boreal species, ranging north to latitude 67° in eastern Siberia. Apart from an isolated population in western China, the most southerly breeding area is on the island of Hokkaido, Japan. There are three subspecies generally recognised; *Luscinia c.*

calliope, which occupies most of the Siberian range, including the island of Sakhalin, and Hokkaido; *L. c. camtschatkensis*, breeding in the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Kurile Islands and (closest to North America) the Kommandorskiy Islands; and *L. c. beicki* from western China (Dementiev *et al.* 1966) (Figure 1). Not all authorities accept the validity of these races (Peters 1964).

On the basis of wing length and the shade of the colour of the

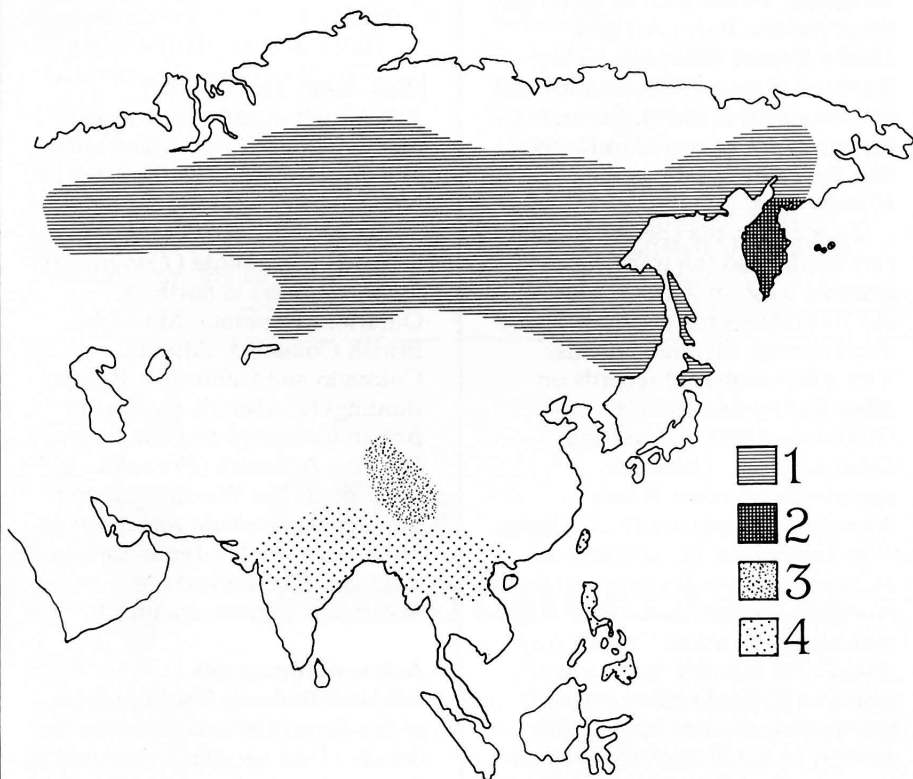


Figure 1. The breeding and wintering ranges of the subspecies of the Siberian Rubythroat. Breeding range of 1. *L. c. calliope*, 2. *L. c. camtschatkensis*, 3. *L. c. beicki* and 4. wintering range of all races.

upperparts, Dr. Ross James of the R.O.M. suggests (pers. comm.) that the Hornby specimen is most likely referable to the race *camtschatkensis*.

The Siberian Rubythroat winters in India, as far west as Gujarat, Burma, northern Thailand, Laos, North Viet-nam, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines (King *et al.* 1975, Fleming *et al.* 1976).

As might be expected from such a long-distance migrant, the species has occurred as a vagrant in a number of extralimital locations. To the west of its range, these include Italy (Arrigoni 1929), France (Mayaud 1936), Scotland (Lowe 1979) and Iceland (Gudmundsson 1944). Several of these records occurred in December, the same month as the Hornby bird.

To the east, the species is a very rare spring and fall transient in extreme western Alaska. Most of the 50 odd records are from the westernmost Aleutian Islands, with a few scattered records on other Bering Sea islands (Roberson 1980, Kessel and Gibson 1978). There are apparently no other North American records south of Alaska.

In view of the occurrences in such locations as Iceland and the Northern Isles of Scotland it might reasonably be asked "which way round" the Hornby bird came to arrive at its final resting place. If the specimen is indeed referable racially to the Kamchatka population, clearly a Pacific route is indicated. However, if not, it seems almost equally feasible that the origin is transatlantic.

As with most extralimital

occurrences of birds, the question of a possible captive origin can be raised. Siberian Rubythroats are kept in captivity; however, due to more stringent regulations in the exporting countries, some years ago the exportation of the species dropped drastically (Inskipp 1981). The specimen was carefully examined before preparation for any indication of having been in captivity (excessive wear of flight feathers, abnormally long claws, or damage to the feathers at the base of the bill), but none was found.

[Eds. note: The Siberian Rubythroat occurrence was evidently part of a widespread influx of Eurasian landbirds recorded in North America during the autumn/winter of 1983. The "invasion" included Bramblings (*Fringilla montifringilla*) in northern Ontario, Minnesota, Manitoba, British Columbia, Alberta, Colorado and California; Rustic Buntings (*Emberiza rustica*) in British Columbia and California; Siberian Accentor (*Prunella montanella*) in Washington and Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) in New Brunswick (*American Birds* Regional Summaries) (A. Wormington, pers. comm.)].

Acknowledgements

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OFO Announcements

Seasonal Summaries of Bird Sightings in Ontario: Please update the lists of sub-regional editors (*Ontario Birds* 1:73-75; 2:52) for *American Birds* as follows:

York: Mr. Bruce Parker, Townhouse 66, 109 Valleywoods Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3A 2R8

Simcoe: Dr. W.E. Zufelt, 221 Belmoral Drive, Orillia, Ontario L3V 5R2

Peel: Mr. Bruce Parker, Townhouse 66, 109 Valleywoods Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3A 2R8