

**FIRST RECORD OF TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE
(*MYADESTES TOWNSENDI*) FOR FLORIDA**

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At 1100 EDT on 9 March 2008, while conducting a bird survey at the Genius Drive Nature Preserve, Winter Park, Orange County, Florida, participant Cecie Catron alerted AB to an unfamiliar bird. AB and BHA identified the bird as a Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), a thrush of western North America. The survey group of seven observed the bird for 20 minutes while it perched about 3 m above ground in a 5 m bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) before it flew into an adjacent private yard and out of sight. At 1220 the bird returned and remained for 45 minutes in a cluster of four trees, each about 10 m in height: one water hickory (*Carya aquatica*); one water oak (*Quercus nigra*); and two presumed laurel oak × live oak hybrids (*Q. laurifolia* × *Q. virginiana*). Photos were obtained. Playback of songs and call notes of Townsend's Solitaire enticed the bird to respond only once, with a high-pitched "peet" that was not recorded. The solitaire returned to the same area at 1700 when more photos (e.g., Fig. 1) and a video were obtained. When BHA departed at 1800, the solitaire remained in the same cluster of four trees where it apparently roosted for the night.

On 13 March 2008, BHA and BP, accompanied by four other surveyors, returned to the Preserve and found the solitaire in the same general area where it was initially found. It remained until the surveyors departed at 1130. Initially, the solitaire perched in the tops of mature live oaks and a camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) where it was seen eating camphor fruit. More photos were obtained of the solitaire, as well as a nearby male Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) another species rare in Florida. The tanager shares much of the solitaire's montane breeding range in the western North America. However, the two birds did not interact, and the tanager left the area shortly after its discovery. Later, the solitaire flew into adjacent private yards before it descended to the middle levels of the same group of four trees where it was seen on 9 March. On both days, the solitaire was studied at distances of 3-20 m. When perched high on an exposed



Figure 1. Townsend's Solitaire at Genius Drive Nature Preserve, Winter Park, Orange County, Florida, 9 March 2008. Photograph by Lyn Atherton.

branch, the solitaire occasionally made short flights, often returning to the same perch, but it was not observed to capture prey during these flights. In addition, it flew to the ground several times, apparently to capture prey that was not identified.

The survey team did not return to the Preserve again until 13 April 2008, the date of the next scheduled survey. From 0830 through 1200, the solitaire was not relocated, nor was it found on subsequent surveys.

The solitaire was about the size of a Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) with an upright posture. Overall, the bird was a medium-gray color. The all-dark bill was shorter than the length of the head that showed dark lores and complete white eye-rings that broadened posteriorly. A thin black malar stripe extended from each side of the lower mandible. The throat and belly were whitish, and the flanks had a brownish tinge. On the upper wings, the lesser coverts were the same grayish color as the back and breast. The primary and greater coverts and flight feathers were mostly blackish. The proximal one-fifth of each primary and secondary was pale buff forming one bold stripe across each open wing and two patches on each closed wing. The undertail coverts were blackish with white tips, and the outer rectrices were largely white. The irides, tarsi, and toes were blackish. The pale tips of the breast and back feathers and some of the greater coverts, as well as the pointed tips of the rectrices indicated that this solitaire was in its second calendar year (Pyle 1997). A slight brownish wash on the gray crown and rump, together with the bold buff stripe on the wings, identified the bird as the nominate race, *M. t. townsendi*, found north of Mexico (Pyle 1997).

The American Ornithologists' Union (1998) recognizes 12 solitaire species belonging to the genus *Myadestes*, with a thirteenth species endemic to South America (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Townsend's Solitaire is the only member of the genus that has been recorded in North America north of Mexico (AOU 1998). It breeds in open montane and subalpine woodlands from east-central and southeastern Alaska, north-central Yukon, west-central and southwestern Mackenzie, southern Alberta, and southwestern Saskatchewan south through the various mountain ranges to south-central California, central Arizona and southern New Mexico. Disjunct populations breed in the Black Hills of South Dakota and in adjacent Nebraska, and the mountains of Durango, Jalisco, and Zacatecas, Mexico (AOU 1998). The species winters at lower elevations, mainly in chaparral, desert, and riparian woodland, from southern British Columbia, southern Alberta, Montana and central North Dakota, south to the southern extreme of its breeding range in Mexico, west to the Pacific coast, and east to western Oklahoma, western Missouri, western Texas, and Nuevo León and Coahuila, Mexico. In winter Townsend's Solitaires wander occasionally east to the Canadian Maritimes and New England (AOU 1998) and prior to 2008 had been reported as far southeast as South Carolina (SCBRC 2006), Mississippi (MOSBRC 2004), and Louisiana (LBRC 2008). The only other account of Townsend's Solitaire in Florida re-

ferred to a second-hand report without details from the Keys during "autumn" 1976 (Edscorn 1977a, 1977b).

Replacing Townsend's Solitaire in the various mountain ranges from Mexico into South America are the Brown-backed Solitaire (*M. occidentalis*), resident from Sonora, Mexico, to central Honduras; Slate-colored Solitaire (*M. unicolor*), resident from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, to north-central Nicaragua; Black-faced Solitaire (*M. melanops*), resident from Costa Rica to western Panama; Varied Solitaire (*M. coloratus*), resident from eastern Panama to extreme northwestern Colombia, South America (AOU 1998); and the Andean Solitaire (*M. ralloides*), endemic to the South American Andes Mountains from eastern Venezuela to southern Peru and northern Bolivia (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Two species are endemic to Antillean mountains: the Cuban Solitaire (*M. elisabeth*), resident of Cuba, and the Rufous-throated Solitaire (*M. genibarbis*), resident of Jamaica, Hispaniola, and from Dominica to St. Vincent (AOU 1998). Three species are resident in the Hawaiian Islands' mountains: the Kamao (*M. myadestinus*); Omao (*M. obscurus*); and Puaiohi (*M. palmeri*). Two other Hawaiian species, the Olomao (*M. lanaiensis*) and the Amaui (*M. woahensis*) are believed to be extinct (AOU 1998). Similar to Townsend's Solitaire, the Black-faced Solitaire engages in altitudinal migration, descending from the high mountains where it breeds to lower elevations at other seasons. These two species are apparently the only *Myadestes* species known to engage in regular seasonal movements (AOU 1998).

Most *Myadestes* solitaires are rather somberly colored. *M. occidentalis*, *M. elisabeth*, and *M. genibarbis* are distinguished from *M. townsendi* by having eye-arcs (Howell and Webb 1995, Raffaele et al. 1998), rather than eye rings. *M. melanops*, *M. coloratus*, and *M. unicolor* have orange or flesh-colored bills and/or feet (Howell and Webb 1995, Stiles and Skutch 1989, Ridgely and Gwynne 1989). *M. ralloides* has a rufescent-brown back and silvery bases to the primaries (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). The Hawaiian solitaire species lack the prominent eye-rings (except *M. palmeri*) and the mostly white outer rectrices of *M. townsendi* (Pratt et al. 1987).

During the winter of 2007-2008 Townsend's Solitaires were considered in irruption that continued into spring 2008 and were reported east to Québec (six; Bannon et al. 2008), New Brunswick (one; Block 2008), Nova Scotia (one; Block 2008), Massachusetts (two; Hunt 2008), New York (two; Rohrbacher et al. 2008), New Jersey (one; Rohrbacher et al. 2008), Virginia (one; Block 2008) and Tennessee (two; Sloan and Palmer-Ball, Jr. 2008; Block 2008). The earliest of these solitaires were in New York 25 November and 20 December (Rohrbacher et al. 2008), Massachusetts 15 and 20 December (Hunt 2008), and Québec 23, 24 and 25 December (Bannon et al. 2008). The

latest dates observed included 29 January in Virginia (Block 2008); 20 February in New Jersey (Rohrbacher et al. 2008); 23 February in Massachusetts (Hunt 2008); 21 January (Sloan and Palmer-Ball, Jr. 2008) and 20 April (Block 2008) in Tennessee; and 26 April in New Brunswick (Retter 2008).

The Genius Drive Nature Preserve is a 17-ha preserve located in east-central Florida, surrounded by urban development and three lakes. A remnant of the former 81-ha Wind Song estate of Richard and Elizabeth Morse Genius, the Preserve is now under the direction of the Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation. The Foundation allows Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, and the Orange Audubon Society, Maitland, Florida, to conduct the Genius Reserve Ecological Restoration Project to restore the property to its historical state and conduct monthly bird surveys. The Preserve includes about 15 habitat types. The solitaire was seen in the vicinity of the Ward House, a vacant two-story restored clapboard house located about 45 m from the north shore of Lake Berry. A lawn landscaped with trees and shrubs spreads east and south of the House. The cluster of four trees the solitaire frequented is south of the House and 10 m from the shore of the Lake. Two estate homes, a part of Windsong subdivision, abut the Preserve to the east of Ward House. To the north of the House, a young citrus grove meets an extensive stand of mostly mature mixed hardwoods with a landscaped understory, and to the west is a continuation of those hardwoods with an understory of native plants that extends to the Lake shore.

The Townsend's Solitaire was seen on only two days in March 2008. The four-hour surveys were conducted only once each month, and given the rather sedentary nature and inconspicuousness of the bird, the solitaire may have been overlooked during previous surveys. The Reserve is closed to the public, and requests made by BHA to the Foundation to allow birders, other than those preapproved to regularly survey the Preserve, access to the property were denied for the reason of liability.

The members of the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee unanimously voted to accept this record (RC #08-680) 30 August 2008.

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