



FIRST RECORD OF BULLOCK'S ORIOLE FOR HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND

DENNIS L. KIRKWOOD

*2659 Bradenbaugh Road, White Hall, Maryland 21161
newarkfarms@gmail.com*

The winter of 2012-13 proved to be an exciting one for birders in Maryland and throughout the mid-Atlantic region as an invasion of northern irruptive species occurred. Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*), Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*), Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus*), and both Red and White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra* and *L. leucoptera*, respectively) flocks made everyone pay more attention to their backyard feeders.

On Monday, 11 February 2013 at approximately 11:00 a.m. EST, I noticed a yellow and black bird at my platform feeder on Bradenbaugh Road in northwestern Harford County. Given the irruptive season we were experiencing, my first thought was Evening Grosbeak as the bird was bigger than the finches and sparrows that typically frequented the feeder. Even though I did not have binoculars handy, I was able to get closer to the feeder and quickly revised my identification to some type of oriole. I noticed the black bib on the bird and then it flew away.



Figure 1. Immature male Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*). Harford County, Maryland, 20 February 2013. Photographed by Jean Kirkwood.

Quickly consulting three field guides and getting my binoculars and camera ready, I waited for the bird to return, which it did in about 15 minutes. After taking a few poor quality pictures, I decided to study the bird with binoculars, this time indoors through a window while about 9 m away from the feeder. The bird showed two large wing-bars intersected by black "teeth," the black bib, and a whitish color to the belly. It also showed a distinct black spot at the base of the lower mandible. I concluded that the bird was a first-year male Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) (Figure 1).

(continued)

Wanting further verification, I called Matt Hafner who was able to have his wife, Dr. Kim Hafner, come over to obtain some clearer pictures and email them to him. Matt was able to verify the identification and shared the pictures with several others who also reached the same conclusion. Fortunately the bird visited for the rest of the afternoon and about 15 people were able to come and observe and photograph the bird.

Our feeder set-up consists of one 30.5-cm² platform feeder with both white millet and black-oil sunflower seeds; one hanging suet feeder; one hanging nyger seed tube; and one hanging sunflower seed tube. The feeders are outside the sliding doors of our living room in an alcove that shelters them from our driveway. A multi-trunk white birch (*Betula* sp.) and two small rhododendrons (*Rhododendron* sp.) are surrounded by eastern white pines (*Pinus strobus*) (height = 18 m) and a privet (*Ligustrum* sp.) hedge (height = 3 m). The oriole was most consistently using the platform feeder, eating the millet and avoiding the sunflower seeds, and increasingly favoring the suet feeder. One attempt to provide orange slices was ignored by the oriole.

My wife, Jean Kirkwood, realized that she had briefly seen the oriole on Sunday, 10 February 2013, one day before my discovery, and our last sighting was on Sunday, 17 March 2013. The bird would appear most days in the morning from 7:30 a.m. and feed for 5-10 minutes before flying off. Its frequency of feeding varied greatly from day to day, sometimes at 30-minute intervals, and at other times, one visit for the entire day. This raised the question of where it was spending the rest of its time.

This mystery was solved when a neighbor, Loretta McGraw, who lived 1 km away, stopped by with pictures of the Bullock's Oriole at her feeder. She had dated photographs from 8 January through 26 April 2013. She reported that the bird used many feeders on different sides of her house and would also disappear into the shrubbery, apparently feeding on the mulched ground. She also has a large grove of white pine along the edge of her yard that the bird seemed to frequent.

According to Phil Davis (Secretary) and Matt Hafner (Member) of the Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee (MD/DCRC), this is the third documented sighting of Bullock's Oriole for the state and the first for Harford County. This was the first time pictures were taken documenting the species in Maryland and the first time at a feeder where birders could have a reasonable chance of seeing the bird. Over the course of the 36 days it visited my feeder, approximately 175 people came to see the bird and the vast majority was successful. The two other accepted records were an adult in female-type plumage on 25 September 1994 at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (Dorchester County) and a male in basic plumage on 24 November 2009 at Sycamore Landing, Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park (Montgomery County). Three other sightings were not accepted by the MD/DCRC and three additional sightings are in the review process (MD/DCRC 2013).

In addition to this Maryland bird (Adams et al. 2013), the winter of 2012-13 also recorded the species in Massachusetts (Hunt 2013), Connecticut (Hunt 2013), Pennsylvania (Fazio and Johnson 2013), North Carolina (Blankenship et al. 2013), Georgia (GCRC 2013), and Florida (Anderson 2013). The North Carolina bird was a reoccurring observation for the second year (Blankenship et al. 2013), and the Pennsylvania bird was for the third straight year (Fazio and Johnson 2013).

Addendum: In late fall 2013, a mature male Bullock's Oriole (Figure 2) was noted at my feeder on 8 December. It was presumed to be the same bird that spent the late winter in 2013. The neighbor who shared it during the 2013 winter first observed the mature male on 26 November 2013. It was very sporadic in its appearances during this time and was last seen on 5 February 2014 by Loretta McGraw at her house.



Figure 2. Adult male Bullock's Oriole. Harford County, Maryland, 23 December 2013. Photographed by Jean Kirkwood.

LITERATURE CITED

- Adams, M. T., R. Ostrowski, and A. Bose. 2013. Middle Atlantic. *North American Birds* 67(2):249.
- Anderson, B. H. 2013. Florida. *North American Birds* 67(2):258.
- Blankenship, K., R. Hall, and J. Southern. 2013. Southern Atlantic. *North American Birds* 67(2):253.
- Fazio, V. W., III, and T. Johnson. 2013. Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley. *North American Birds* 67(2):269.
- GCRC (Georgia Ornithological Society Checklist and Records Committee). 2013. 2013 GCRC Activity, Completed Records. Available at <http://www.gos.org/checklists/gcrc-activity-2013.html>. Accessed 5 September 2014.
- Hunt, P. 2013. New England. *North American Birds* 67(2):242.
- MD/DCRC (Maryland/District of Columbia Records Committee). 2013. MD/DCRC Database Abridged Version, Maryland, 4 October 2013, MD/DCRC Database Status & Decision Definitions. Available at <http://www.mdbirds.org/mdderc/pdf/mddatabase.pdf>. Accessed 4 September 2014.