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Coalinga, California, March 18, 1935.

SYSTEMATIC STATUS OF SOME NORTHWESTERN BIRDS

By H. S. SWARTH

TRINGA SOLITARIA

In our standard books, wherever the Solitary Sandpiper is dealt with, there is unhesitating recognition of two subspecies, Eastern (*Tringa solitaria solitaria*) and Western (*T. s. cinnamomea*), a recognition that I do not believe is warranted by the facts. In the A. O. U. Check-list there is a most positive and definite allotment of territory to each that, too, can not be substantiated. To clear up the uncertainty that I felt from the appearance of the first several specimens of this species that I collected in the Atlin region, British Columbia, I made an effort to get more, with a resulting series of nineteen skins. There are also at hand eight more from Yukon Territory near-by, six from Forty-mile, two from White Horse.

As regards subspecific characters, Ridgway (Birds N. and Mid. Am., pt. 8, 1919, p. 363) describes *cinnamomea* as follows: "Similar to *T. s. solitaria,* but larger; summer adults with upper parts much less distinctly spotted with whitish, white bars on tail averaging decidedly narrower (and blackish ones correspondingly broader), and middle pair of retrices often (usually?) wholly deep brownish gray; young with spotting on upper parts decided brownish buffy or cinnamomeous, instead of whitish." Brewster, in the original description of *Totanus solitarius cinnamomeus,* gives an additional character: "The outer primary finely mottled with ashy white along the border of its inner web for a distance of about an inch beyond the tips of the under primary coverts" (Auk, 7, 1890, p. 377). I have carefully checked all these features within my Atlin series and as compared with series from other parts of North America.

First, as to size. Tables of measurements that I have compiled of all available specimens would occupy too much space for presentation, and I will restrict myself to some figures showing length of wing, commonly accepted as an index to general size. In support of the statement ascribing greater size to *cinnamomea,* Ridgway (*loc. cit.*) gives the following wing measurements: *T. s. solitaria,* wing, male, 121.5-129.5 mm.; female, 126-134. *T. s. cinnamomea,* male, 124-137; female, 137-142

Fourteen male birds from Atlin have the following wing measurements: 124.5, 126.5, 127.5, 129.0, 130.0, 130.0, 130.5, 131.5, 132.0, 132.5, 134.0, 135.0, 136.5, 139.0. Five females, 127.0, 134.0, 138.0, 138.5, 142.0. By measurement, in which category do these birds belong? If some in each, where should the dividing line be drawn? Measurements of tail, culmen and tarsus show a similar range, but the different parts do not vary uniformly in the same direction.

As to differences in markings of upper parts and tail that are ascribed to adults of the eastern and western birds, I am unable to detect them in any degree. The supposedly less intense cinnamon of the dorsal spots in the young of the eastern bird I could not satisfactorily ascertain, due to a paucity of eastern specimens, but it is

variable in western birds. This is apparently an evanescent color, and it is most intense in northern birds taken soon after this plumage is acquired. The mottling on the inner web of the outer primary is an extremely variable feature. Of three birds shot at Atlin on May 13, 1934, feeding together about the same little pond, one has no trace of this mark, one has it faintly indicated, in one it is conspicuous, and this, I think, is fairly indicative of its mode of occurrence throughout the west. According to Brewster (*loc. cit.*), it sometimes is seen in eastern birds.

From an analysis of the characters of six birds from Churchill, Manitoba, by Taverner (Annals Carnegie Mus., 23, 1934, pp. 38-39), it appears that variability such as I have described occurs in the Solitary Sandpiper there, too, thus from the northwestern limit of its range east at least as far as Hudson Bay. That the explanation of this condition is that two distinct subspecies are found in this general region, and that the two migrate together through British Columbia and Alberta (Taverner, *loc. cit.*), I refuse to believe until breeding birds are collected that actually demonstrate segregation of the two during the nesting season. My Atlin series assuredly represents one taxonomic unit, and birds from within this series may be selected as representative of both described subspecies. The species does breed about Atlin, for though no nests were found, female birds were collected that contained partly formed eggs.

To summarize, I disbelieve in the existence of two distinguishable geographic subspecies of *Tringa solitaria*. There are certain variable features within the species, and possibly individual variation is more pronounced toward the west; but to pick out individual specimens on migration or in the winter home, specimens that show one character or another in special emphasis, and to label such birds as one subspecies or another is useless and misleading. For it does not tell where that bird came from, which is an important reason for attempting to recognize minor differences in the population of a migratory species.

There are features in the distribution and migration of *Tringa solitaria* in the west that I have not seen set forth, and that need to be considered in any such discussion as this. In the northwest it breeds from northern British Columbia, east of the Coast Range, north to the limit of timber. Details of distribution in British Columbia remain to be worked out. Though of regular occurrence in the Atlin region, I did not find it in summer in certain regions to the southward, in the valley of the upper Stikine River, or on the upper Skeena. It is not a coastal species. In southeastern Alaska there are only one or two occurrences known, and those of migrants at points where they might be explained as stragglers from the adjacent interior. It has not been found, I believe, upon the Queen Charlotte Islands or on Vancouver Island. In California it is almost unknown from the northern two-thirds of the state. It is a regular migrant in southern California, south of the Tehachapi Mountains, but there are almost no records or specimens from other points. The species is not included, for example, in Tyler's "Some Birds of the Fresno District, California," or in Grinnell and Wythe's "Directory to the Bird-life of the San Francisco Bay Region." Neither is it included in Jewett and Gabrielson's "Birds of the Portland Area, Oregon."

Migration from the extreme northwest tends southward, I think to the southeast, probably east of the Rocky Mountains. Manner of occurrence in southern California is suggestive of migration to and from some region to the northeast, a similar route to that traversed by the Mountain Plover. Any deductions drawn from the vague and complicated minor physical variations within a series of *Tringa*

solitaria should be correlated with geographic distribution and migration, and these latter features obviously are still imperfectly understood.

For further example, I have at hand four specimens from Patagonia, southeastern Arizona, taken, respectively, on August 29, August 31, September 10, and September 11, 1927. Two females show mottling on the outer primary, two males do not; on dorsal coloration all four would be classed as of the eastern subspecies. Measurements are non-conclusive. If, after balancing these several modifying features one way or another, I decide to affix to the specimens a subspecific term, *solitaria* or *cinnamomea*, what purpose is served? It seems to me, none at all. We have now had analyses of series of specimens from various western localities, notably by Taverner from Mount Logan, Alaska (Nat. Mus. Canada, Ann. Rep. for 1927 [1929], pp. 73-74), and from Churchill, Manitoba, previously cited. These series, as also my own from Atlin, all breeding birds, are subspecifically indeterminable, as anyone can see. I submit that subspecific names might be ignored for the time being. Analysis of a series of breeding birds from some one locality east of Hudson Bay might be illuminating.

As a matter of interest it may be recorded here that several Solitary Sandpipers collected about shallow ponds near Atlin in August, 1929, had their crops well filled with small fresh-water snails, swallowed whole. These snails have been identified by Dr. G. Dallas Hanna, California Academy of Sciences, as *Lymnaea vahlii* Beck.

FALCO COLUMBARIUS

A western subspecies of the Pigeon Hawk, entitled *Falco columbarius bendirei*, was named by H. Kirke Swann in 1922 (Bull. Brit. Orn. Club, 42, p. 66); type locality, Fort Walla Walla, Washington. In the eleven printed lines of description, comparison is mostly with *F. c. richardsonii*, which is unimportant. To differentiate the new form from typical *F. c. columbarius*, which is more to the point, we are told that the male of *bendirei* (adult or immature not stated) is lighter slate above and with tail bands that are "greyish white, instead of slate grey." I submit that as a contribution to the study of geographic variation this is sheer rubbish. And I protest against the inclusion of such a subspecies in standard works like "Peters' Check-list of Birds of the World" and the A. O. U. "Check-list of North American Birds" (in the latter case with an elaborately detailed "range"), without our being given any further confirmatory information. I am aware that the policy has been advocated of admitting to the "Check-list" *any* proposed name, however sketchily characterized, leaving to the future the more difficult task of confirmation or repudiation. This does not seem fair. Anyone who is really desirous of getting at the facts in such a case is put to the labor that the original describer was unwilling or incompetent to undertake. Also, it is far easier to obtain recognition for a foolish name than to have it discredited. In the case in hand, I have examined series of Pigeon Hawks wherever opportunity has offered without being able to substantiate the existence of a western race, *bendirei;* but the problem is not as simple as it at first appears.

There must be considered in this connection the status of *Falco columbarius* var. *Suckleyi* Ridgway (Bull. Essex Inst., 5, no. 12, Dec., 1873, p. 201), type locality Fort Steilacoom, Washington. There is no question here as to the existence of the ascribed characters, which are conspicuous enough, but there is great question as to the significance of those characters. *Suckleyi* was described, and has been regarded, as an extremely satisfying example of the darkening effect of the humid coastal

environment of the northwest, as another "saturated" local race. However, breeding birds are unknown from any point whatsoever, and, so far as I am aware, no specimens of *suckleyi* have been collected on the coast north of Vancouver Island. On the other hand, migrants have been collected east of the Coast Range the entire length of British Columbia. South-bound migrants collected by myself near Atlin, where the form is not uncommon, were taken such a short distance south of the Yukon Territory boundary as to make it obvious that *suckleyi* must breed in at least the upper portion of the Yukon drainage. In the Atlin region, *columbarius* and *suckleyi* occur in about equal numbers. Indeed, so far as I know, wherever *suckleyi* has been collected typical *columbarius* has been found as well. Do not these facts point toward the probability of the existence of two color phases of *Falco columbarius* in the northwest rather than of two geographic races? Is there, indeed, anything corroborative of geographic segregation of these forms?

As before remarked, I am unable to distinguish between eastern and western examples of *Falco columbarius* in normal plumage, but it may be desirable to recognize a northwestern subspecies on the same grounds as *Buteo borealis calurus,* that is, on the basis of a dimorphism that is prevalent over part of the species' range. For this subspecies the name *Falco columbarius suckleyi* is available, of course; *bendirei* should be ruled out in any event. But we are in need of understanding rather than of names.

Peters (*op. cit.,* p. 296) states that *suckleyi* breeds on Kodiak Island. The basis for this statement I do not know, but a breeding male at hand from Sitkalidak (an islet adjoining Kodiak) is typical *columbarius.*

VERMIVORA CELATA

The Orange-crowned Warbler occurs in this northwestern country as three distinct subspecies, illustrating in a satisfactory manner certain important features in distribution and migration. First, on the coast is *Vermivora celata lutescens,* of small size and bright greenish yellow color. This race, ranging from southern Alaska southward, is closely confined to the coast. In the Sitkan district it has been found only on the islands and on the narrow strip of mainland west of the Coast Range. Migration follows the coast. In the northern interior of British Columbia is the subspecies *Vermivora celata orestera* Oberholser (Auk, 22, 1905, p. 243; type locality, Willis, New Mexico). This race is not recognized in the A. O. U. Check-list, but I find it readily distinguishable. Compared with *V. c. celata* it averages slightly larger; in color it is decidedly more yellowish, and usually without a trace of the grayish tinge that is so apparent on the dorsum and head of *celata.* The eyelid is yellow; in *celata* it is gray. Compared with *lutescens, orestera* may be distinguished by greater size and darker, less yellowish color. All this was pointed out by Oberholser, in his original description (*loc. cit.*) and later (Auk, 34, 1917, p. 326). Oberholser had no material showing the occurrence of *orestera* farther north than southern British Columbia, but it is so common at Atlin as to make it seem likely that the range extends far down the Yukon drainage.

Much of the Atlin avifauna is derived from eastern North America, but there is included also an assemblage representative of the Great Basin, and *orestera* belongs in this latter aggregation. In migration it keeps strictly east of the Coast Range, just as *lutescens* keeps to the west. I have never taken a migrating *lutescens* in the Atlin region, nor a migrating *orestera* on the Alaskan coast.

The breeding *orestera* population leaves Atlin very promptly when the nesting

season is over, just at the advent of a migrating wave of another type of Orange-crowned Warbler. It was only by close and patient watchfulness that I was finally able to collect specimens of both at the same time and in comparable plumages. My latest date for *orestera* is August 28; the bulk of the population is gone by the end of July. The on-coming migrants are of the subspecies *V. celata celata,* arriving usually during the first week in August; last seen September 9. These birds are readily recognizable in life by the gray head. This migrating wave is, I think, from the northeast. Though *orestera* apparently travels due south from the summer home, never straying to the coast, stragglers from the south-bound wave of *celata* drift westward through the Coast Range, probably along such a highway as the Taku River. I collected specimens at Port Snettisham, Alaska, in August, 1909 (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., 7, 1911, p. 97).

What is still needed is field work in regions north and east of Atlin, to demonstrate the boundary between the summer homes of *orestera* and *celata.* I have seen a few Atlin specimens, spring migrants, that show a tendency toward *celata,* mostly in the increased grayish cast above. Probably the boundary line is not far distant. Specimens in collections from the Yukon drainage should be carefully examined with the above facts in mind.

Incidentally, nearly all records of *lutescens* from eastern Arizona really pertain to migrating *orestera.* I have seen only one or two typical *lutescens* from as far east as Tucson.

DENDROICA AESTIVA

With an accumulated series of twenty specimens (a few additional young birds) from Atlin, with about as many more from adjacent regions north and south, I find corroboration of my first impression that the Yellow Warbler of the northwestern interior is most nearly like the eastern *D. aestiva aestiva.* As between *aestiva, rubiginosa* and *brewsteri,* color and markings in the adult male seem to be the most reliable distinguishing features, perhaps the only ones. On the average, the Atlin birds and eastern birds show the same heavy chestnut ventral streaks, as compared with the much lighter markings of *brewsteri* and *rubiginosa.* Above, the northwestern birds do appear to be slightly more greenish, eastern birds a clearer yellow. It is just possible that the northern birds are representative of a middle-western race, to which there has been applied the name *Dendroica aestiva morcomi* Coale (Bull. Ridgway Orn. Club., no. 2, 1887, p. 82; type locality, Fort Bridger, Wyoming). But it is possible, too, that the observed color differences are due to different degrees of wear. The northern specimens at hand were all collected in June and later; the eastern specimens mostly in April and May. Birds from as far north as Forty-mile, Yukon Territory, and as far south as the upper Stikine River, are like Atlin specimens. I should regard this region (and probably much farther down the Yukon) as the northwestern extreme of the habitat of *Dendroica aestiva aestiva.* The migration route I feel sure is to and from the southeast, entirely east of the Rocky Mountains.

On the coast of southeastern Alaska, the Sitkan district, there is not much territory suitable to Yellow Warblers, and they are rare. Mostly they are found at river mouths along the mainland. This is the form to which the name *rubiginosa* has been applied; its affinities appear to be with *brewsteri.* It is slightly darker colored, above and below, but has the same characteristically sparse chestnut streaking on the breast. I have seen specimens from as far west as Prince William Sound; presumably it ranges westward at least as far as Kodiak Island. Locally it is known

to extend inland up the valley of the Skeena River as far as Hazelton. The migration route appears to adhere closely to the coast. In California there occur not uncommonly certain dark-colored immatures, south-bound, that are regarded as migrating *rubiginosa*. This may be correct, but at the same time there are at hand comparable immatures from southeastern Alaska that are not so markedly different from the same stage in *brewsteri*. Plumage changes in *Dendroica aestiva* due to season and age are not clear, and subspecific terms when based on other than adult males should be used with caution, at least as regards the three forms here commented upon.

California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, April 19, 1935.

A NEW RACE OF RUFFED GROUSE FROM VANCOUVER ISLAND

By H. B. CONOVER

A few months ago I received a shipment of eight specimens of Ruffed Grouse from Vancouver Island. They were first labeled as *Bonasa umbellus sabini*, but later, on comparing them with mainland specimens from the coastal regions of British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, the island birds were found to be very different.

Bonasa umbellus sabini was described by David Douglas in 1829 (Trans. Linnaean Soc., 16, p. 137). The type locality is given as "Coast of northwest America between the 40° and 49° parallels from Cape Mendocino to Vancouver Island." On page 62 of the "Journal Kept by David Douglas 1823-1827" (published under the direction of the Royal Horticultural Society, 1914), Douglas in a condensed account of his journal in his own handwriting speaks of spending the time from November 15, 1825, to March 20, 1826, at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. He also states (p. 153) that during that time he collected *Tetrao sabini* and *Tetrao richardsoni*, two pairs of the former being preserved, one male of which was destroyed by rats. I therefore suggest as a restricted type locality for *Bonasa umbellus sabini* (Douglas) the vicinity of Vancouver, Washington.

As Douglas did not visit Vancouver Island, at least not prior to 1829, according to his journals, the name *sabini* cannot be used for birds from that locality.

The new form may be known as

Bonasa umbellus brunnescens, new subspecies

Type.—From Comox, Comox District, Vancouver Island, British Columbia; no. 11,543, adult male, in the Conover Collection, Field Museum of Natural History. Collected October 28, 1934, by H. M. Laing.

Characters.—Differs from *B. u. sabini* in the much browner (less reddish) upper surface except the tail. In the red phase *brunnescens* has the tail dull ochraceous umber instead of ferruginous as in *sabini*, and the black cross-barring beneath is not followed by a light ochraceous bar. In the gray phase, the tail is gray with no reddish coloration and it also lacks the double cross-barring of *sabini*.

Differs from both *B. u. umbelloides* and *B. u. yukonensis* in the much darker (browner) upper surface and by having the under surface much more buffy and more heavily barred with brown.

Differs from *B. u. togata* as follows: in the red phase the upper surface is much darker (browner, less reddish); the tail is dull ochraceous umber, less reddish, and lacks the lighter cross-bars beneath the black ones; in the gray phase the upper surface is darker, and the tail is less heavily barred with black; in both phases the under surface is much more heavily barred with brown, but the cross-bars are paler, and the light tip to the tail is much narrower.