

A PROBABLE NESTING RECORD OF THE NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH IN OREGON

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On 4 June 1977 Sayre Greenfield, Alan Contreras and I observed a pair of Northern Waterthrushes (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) on the south bank of Crescent Creek at Crescent Creek Campground, south of Davis Lake on the east side of the Cascade Range in Deschutes County, Oregon. Although there have been at least three previous sightings of the Northern Waterthrush in Oregon (Gabrielson and Jewett, *Birds of Oregon*, 1940:508-509; Kridler, *Auk* 82:496-497, 1965; E. G. Whiteswift pers. comm.), apparently this is the first time a pair of this species has been seen in the state.

Crescent Creek is a deep, swift-moving stream bordered by heavy grasses and lined with willows (*Salix* sp.) and a few stunted Red Alders (*Alnus rubra*). These small, bushy trees form dense thickets extending 50-200 m from the edges of the creek back to the beginnings of the dominant forest, a mixture of Ponderosa Pines (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Lodgepole Pines (*P. contortus*). The deciduous thickets are quite moist and are laced with small pools and wet areas.

The birds we observed appeared at about 1000, in response to imitations of the call of the Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*), and were seen from a distance of about 10 m directly across the creek under perfect, sunny observing conditions, through 7x and 8x binoculars. They both emerged from the dense undergrowth and perched together, tails bobbing and bodies held in a horizontal plane, for over a minute in a dead willow on the creek's edge. Field marks noted by all observers included: pale colored tarsi, thin bill, dark crown, dark eye line, creamy-yellowish superciliary line, dark back and rectrices, and underparts with a distinctly yellowish wash and dark brown spotty streaking. The streaking reached up onto the throats of both birds and grew finer in this region. However, on one bird the streaks ended on the breast and sides, while on the other they extended, more typically, well down onto the belly. Such highly visible dimorphism is not mentioned in the literature, and its significance in these birds is unclear. The strong yellowish hue on the undersides renders somewhat unlikely the subspecies classification of *S. n. notabilis*, the common western race, and possibly places these birds into either the eastern subspecies, *S. n. noveboracensis*, or the British Columbia race, *S. n. limnaeus*. The describers of the latter subspecies (McCabe and Miller, *Condor* 35:196, 1933) write that it is less yellow than the eastern variety and more yellow than the western. Sayre Greenfield, who is familiar with *S. n. noveboracensis* in the Ithaca, New York area, noted at the time that the Crescent Creek birds appeared fully as yellowish underneath as any he had seen in the eastern United States.

Perhaps most significantly, both waterthrushes remained in precisely the same location for at least the next month. During June the pair was seen repeatedly and photographed (Larry McQueen, Harry Nehls et al.) and one, presumably the male, was heard singing on all occasions. On 21 June I returned to the site and observed the singing male and, more briefly, the second bird low on the banks of the creek, not more than 5 m from the location of the initial sighting. The second bird disappeared almost immediately and made no sound, while the male continued its loud, crisp song from various spots as I followed it through the undergrowth. Its singing was quite persistent. A careful search of the more accessible portions of the area failed to reveal a nest, but the waterthrush is a species noted for clever concealment of its nest. The willow thickets back from the creek are next to impenetrable and contain many small pools, any one of whose margins may well have contained a waterthrush nest.

NOTES

The birds were last seen on 24 June by Harry Nehls and David Fix. Though they were not seen thereafter, they were heard several times in July (Harry Nehls pers. comm.). Their date of departure remains unknown. They were not present when I searched the area on 10 August. Their absence on this date is not unexpected, for they are known to begin southward migration before the end of July and to reach the South American wintering grounds as early as mid-August (Bent, U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 203:484, 1940).

In summary, it is highly probable that these two Northern Waterthrushes at least attempted to nest along Crescent Creek, considering that they were, in all likelihood, a male and a female (obvious behavioral differences and possible sexual dimorphism), that they remained in close proximity both to each other and to the site of first observation for at least a month, and that timing and habitat were ideally conducive to waterthrush reproduction. These observations and the sighting of lone, singing male on 18 June 1977 by Larry McQueen (pers. comm.) on the Little Deschutes River, not far from Crescent Creek, suggest the possibility of the establishment of this species as a rare breeding bird in suitable habitat along the eastern flanks of the Oregon Cascade Range. They should be watched for in the future in this region, and all sighting should be carefully studied for subspecies identification.

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