

AUTUMN INLAND OCCURRENCE OF PRAIRIE WARBLER (*DENDROICA DISCOLOR*) AT KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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On 16 November 2008, while birding near Tranquille, 18 km west of the centre of Kamloops, British Columbia, I stopped at a dense patch of shrubs to pish-out birds that may be hidden or roosting in the tangles. The vegetation consisted mainly of black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*) with some Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*) and other small shrubs (Figure 1). Soon a male Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*), three Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*), and two



Figure 1. Dense patch of black hawthorn, Nootka rose, and other shrubs frequented by the Prairie Warbler near Tranquille, BC. 16 November 2008 (Jan Bradshaw). BC Photo 3661a.

immature White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) responded as did a small bright yellow warbler. I realized that the bird was something quite different so I hastily made field notes because I wanted to get some photographs. My notes were as follows: “looked like imm, all yellow breast and belly with heavy black streaking at side, yellow around eye, greenish, brownish back, and white on outer tail feathers as flew.” I quickly took a few photographs to document the occurrence (Figure 2) when suddenly a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) flew into the bushes where the warbler and other birds were perching. The hawk remained in the tangles for about five minutes before leaving without prey.

When I returned home I initially identified the bird as a male Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*). I contacted Rick Howie who confirmed it as a Prairie Warbler and posted the sighting to various bird groups. Later images were examined by Wayne Campbell who aged the bird as a first autumn male. He sent copies to Kimball Garrett for additional comment. Kimball wrote: *As I believe you also suggested, the bird appears to be a hatch-year (“first fall”) male. I believe that an adult male is ruled out by the whitish tones to the arcs above and below the eye and the limited black in the moustachial stripe. Hatch-year birds, of course, vastly outnumber adults among fall vagrants anyway. Females, particularly first fall birds, would not show the bold black areas on the face and lateral breast stripes and in general would have more subdued patterning.*

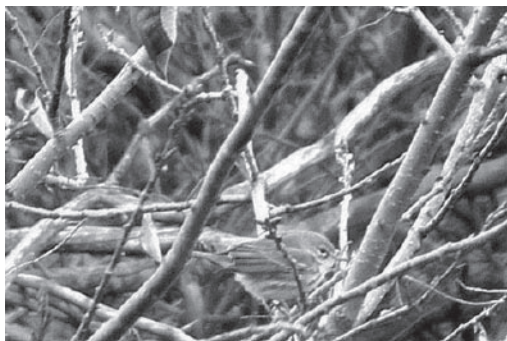


Figure 2. Lateral view of male Prairie Warbler perched in dense shrubs near Tranquille, BC. 16 November 2008 (Jan Bradshaw). BC Photo 3661b.



Figure 3. Frontal view of male Prairie Warbler perched in a wild rose shrub showing the distinctive facial pattern. Near Tranquille, BC. 18 November 2008 (Richard R. Howie). BC Photo 3661j.

As always, true “ageing and sexing” is possible only with close in-hand examination or, ideally, examination of gonads and skull ossification, but this does seem like a fairly clear hatch-year male.

The following day, on 17 November, the hawthorn patch was checked but the warbler was not found. On 18 November the bird was again observed in the same patch of shrubs within metres of where it was first found (UTM coordinates NAD 10U 677205E 5621930N). It was observed for about an hour feeding on tiny flies, occasionally leaping into the air to catch them (R. Howie pers. comm.). Several additional photographs were obtained (Figure 3). The warbler was last seen on 19 November (R. Howie pers. comm.).

The Prairie Warbler breeds in southern Ontario and throughout the eastern United States and winters in southern Florida, the Bahamas, and Caribbean islands (Nolan et al. 1999). In western North America the Prairie Warbler is a casual visitor. In California it is a regular transient from mid-August to November (Small 1994, Dunn and Garrett 1997). In Oregon it has been recorded on at least 15 occasions, and again, mainly in the autumn from 3 September to 24 October (Nehls in Marshall et al. 2003). In Washington state there is just one winter record (Wahl et al. 2005).

In British Columbia, the Prairie Warbler has previously been recorded along the coast in spring (an adult male on 29 May 1995 at Chesterman Beach near Tofino; A. Dorst pers. comm.), autumn (an immature male at Triangle Island on 8 September

1995; Bowling 1996; BC Photo 1937), and winter (an adult from 18 December 1993 to 25 January 1994 at Masset; Siddle 1994). A summer record of an adult male on 17 June 1977 on Mount Kobau, even though well-described, was listed as hypothetical by Cannings et al. (1987) because it was seen only by a single observer and subsequently, after further examination, was considered hypothetical for British Columbia (Campbell et al. 2001).

This is the first confirmed record for the interior of British Columbia. Elsewhere in western North America vagrant occurrences of Prairie Warbler are few in interior locations compared to numerous coastal records (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Kimball Garrett (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA), Wayne Campbell (Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies, Victoria, BC), and Rick Howie (Kamloops, BC) for examining numerous digital images and confirming the bird’s identification and age. R. Wayne Campbell, Adrian Dorst, and Mitch Meredith provided records for other British Columbia occurrences and Rick Howie additional information on the precise location, departure date, and behavioural activities for the Tranquille bird.

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About the Author

Since moving to British Columbia from Ontario in 1971 with a passion for birds, Jan has contributed greatly to our knowledge of bird life in the Harrison Hot Springs, Shuswap Lake, and Kamloops areas.

See British Columbia Nest Record Scheme: 54th annual report – 2008 nesting season. [Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies Report No. 10, 2009] for a more detailed biography.