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Birds of the Rocky Mountains -- Paul A. Johnsgard

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***Birds of the Rocky Mountains*—Species Accounts, pages
314–322: Waxwings, Shrikes, & Vireos**

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Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

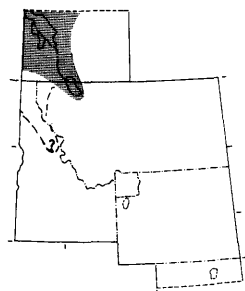
Identification: Like the following species, this waxwing has a distinctive olive-yellow general plumage color, a short crest, a black mask, and a yellow-tipped tail. Unlike the cedar waxwing, this species has rusty brown under tail coverts, yellow and white markings on the wings, and a somewhat larger body size. Both species utter almost constant high-pitched hissing or trilling sounds, but that of the Bohemian waxwing is lower-pitched and more rasping.

LATILONG STATUS

r	W	R	
	W	W	W
S	W	W	W

W	W		W
W	W	W	W
W	W	W	W

W	W	W	W
		W	W
W	W	W	W



Status: A breeding summer resident in montane forests as far south as Glacier N.P., and a migrant or winter resident farther south, including the other montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: During the breeding season this species is associated with coniferous and mixed forests, often nesting in loosely associated groups in conifer groves. Outside the breeding season the birds move about opportunistically, seeking out sources of berries and small fruits in trees and hedges, such as mountain ash (rowan), crabapples, pyracantha, and the like.

Seasonality: In Alberta the birds are present year-around, and egg records extend from May 24 to June 13, with the majority of records between May 29 and June 6. Except where they breed in northern Montana the birds are mainly winter residents, present from October to April. In Wyoming and Colorado they are typically present from early November to April.

Comments: The winter distribution of this species is quite variable, and is probably determined by the severity of winter weather and especially the availability of berries in more northerly areas.

Suggested Reading: Bent, 1965.

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Identification: Very similar in appearance to the preceding species, but without white and yellow wing markings, and lacking the distinctively rusty under tail covert coloration. The birds are distinctly smaller than Bohemian waxwings, and their voices are higher-pitched.

Status: Widespread over the wooded areas of the region, present in all the montane parks and probably breeding in all of them except Rocky Mountain N.P., where apparently only a rare summer visitor.

Habitats and Ecology: Somewhat open woodlands, primarily of broadleaved species, are used for nesting, including riparian forests, farmsteads, parks, cedar groves, shelterbelts, and brushy edges of forests. Areas that have abundant growths of berry-bearing bushes are especially favored, although insects, buds, and other food sources are also consumed.

Seasonality: Locally resident as far north as Colorado, although more common in winter than in summer. In Wyoming the records are from early May to November, and they usually do not arrive in central Alberta until early June. Most have left by the end of September, but some occasionally winter with flocks of Bohemian waxwings. Montana egg records are from June 11 to August 19, and similar dates seem to apply to Alberta.

Comments: Like the Bohemian waxwing, this is a highly social species, and nesting occurs in somewhat clumped patterns, with breeding seemingly timed to coincide with the period of maximum berry and fruit availability.

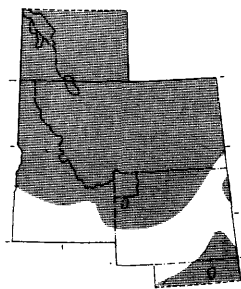
Suggested Reading: Lea, 1942; Bent, 1950; Putnam, 1949.

LATILONG STATUS

S	S	S	s
s	S	s	S
S	S	S	S

S	S	s	S
M	s	S	S
M	r	s	S

s	M	M	M
M	M	M	M
r	s	s	R



Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)

Identification: Like the following species, this predatory songbird has a mostly grayish body color, with a black mask, a white-edged black tail, and black wings with a large white patch at the base of the primary flight feathers. Young birds of both species are less distinctly patterned. Separation of the northern from the loggerhead shrike is difficult, but this species is generally paler, especially on the head and back, and has a narrower black mask that does not extend forward above the beak, which is longer and heavier than that of the loggerhead. Mainly present during winter months.

LATILONG STATUS

W	W	M	
W	W	W	M
W	W	W	W

W	W	M	W
M	W	W	W
	W	W	W

W	W	W	W
	W	W	W
W	W	M	W

Status: A winter resident or migrant throughout the region, mainly at lower elevations. Reported from all the montane parks, but generally uncommon to rare in all.

Habitats and Ecology: Invariably associated with open landscapes such as agricultural lands or grasslands that have scattered observation points such as fence posts or small trees. Reported as high as 9,500 feet in Colorado, but primarily occurring at lower elevations. Usually solitary, and sometimes seen where small birds such as sparrows are likely to gather. The nearest breeding area is in northeastern Alberta near Lake Athabaska.

Seasonality: Colorado records are from October 11 to June 1, and Wyoming records extend from October to April. Likewise, Montana records span a similar period, while in southern Alberta the birds typically migrate through in October and again in March and April, rarely wintering as far north as Edmonton.

Comments: Like the loggerhead shrike, this species is an effective predator, but tends to concentrate on small prey such as insects, small rodents, and sparrow-sized birds. Summer foods are primarily insects; only in winter are birds and small mammals regularly killed.

Suggested Reading: Cade, 1962, 1967; Miller, 1931.



Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Identification: Very similar to the preceding species, but slightly smaller, considerably darker on the head and upperparts, and with a broader dark mask through the eye that extends forward above the bill and is often only slightly margined with white on the upper edge. Both species are found in open country, but this one is most likely to be seen from spring through fall, while the northern is more prone to be seen during the worst winter months.

Status: A summer resident and migrant nearly throughout the region, except for the mountainous portions of Alberta and northern Idaho, where rare or accidental. Probably breeds in most or all of the U.S. montane parks of the region, although specific records are lacking.

Habitats and Ecology: Like the northern shrike, this species is associated with open habitats having scattered perching sites, and ranges altitudinally from agricultural lands on the prairies to montane meadows. Sagebrush areas, desert scrub, and pinyon-juniper woodlands offer ideal nesting and foraging areas, but some nesting also occurs in woodland edge situations, farmlands, and similar sites.

Seasonality: Colorado records are from March 8 to November 20, with birds occasionally wintering. Wyoming records are from mid-April to mid-October, with rare wintering. Montana and Alberta records are from late April to about September, generally overlapping only very slightly with periods of northern shrike occurrence. Wyoming egg records are from May 29 to June 12, and in Montana and Alberta active nests have been noted from mid-June to late July.

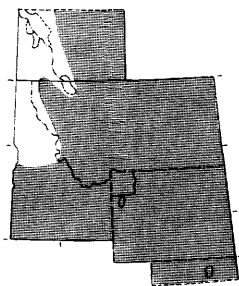
Suggested Reading: Linsdale, 1938; Smith, 1973; Wemmer, 1969; Porter et al., 1975.

LATILONG STATUS

M	M	s	s
	s	M	s
s	M	s	?

S	?	S	S
M	s	S	S
s	s	s	S

s	S	s	S
S	s	S	S
S	S	s	S



European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Identification: Starlings might be easily confused with other "blackbirds," but have much slimmer and more pointed beaks, which are variably yellow in adults. They also have much more pointed wings, a feature very evident in flying birds, and a very rapid wing-beat. The plumage varies greatly with age and season, but during the summer months is mostly iridescent over most of the head and body, and during the winter the body plumage is variably tipped with white spotting.

LATILONG STATUS

R	R	R	s
S	R	s	S
R	R	R	R

R	R	S	R
S	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

R	M	R	R
r	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

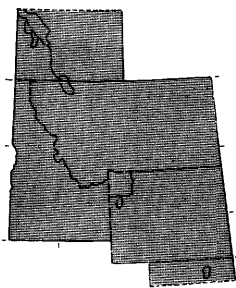
Status: Present throughout the entire region, usually as a year-round resident, although substantial migration does occur. A fairly common breeder in all the montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: Largely associated with humans, and most abundant in cities, farm areas, and suburbs, but also utilizing natural woodlands with woodpecker holes or other nest sites, such as aspen groves, where it competes effectively with native hole-nesting birds.

Seasonality: Present year-around throughout the region, although in Alberta only relatively few birds actually overwinter. Colorado egg records are for May, as are available records from Montana, but in adjacent North Dakota breeding records extend from mid-April to early July. Probably double-brooded in this region.

Comments: This introduced species has caused a great deal of damage to native species such as bluebirds, which it manages to dominate and exclude from their nesting holes. It also has caused a great deal of damage to agricultural interests, and as such is one of the least desirable of all song-birds.

Suggested Reading: Planck, 1967; Dunnett, 1955; Kessel, 1957.



Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*)

Identification: This species is the only vireo of the region that has distinctive white wing-bars and a white eye-ring (rather than an eye-stripe), and furthermore is relatively large, with a bluish gray upperpart coloration and a white throat. Its song consists of a series of slurred, deliberate phrases similar to those of an American robin, usually with 2 or 3 notes per phrase.

Status: A summer resident in forested areas over most of the region, occurring in all the montane parks and known to breed in several, but apparently rare in Yellowstone and Grand Teton N.P.

Habitats and Ecology: Open, coniferous or mixed forest with considerable undergrowth seem to be this species' favored habitat, especially those that offer open branches for foraging at low to medium tree levels. Fairly dry and warm forests are favored over moist and cool ones, and breeding extends from the open oak or aspen and ponderosa pine zones upward through the lower coniferous communities, to about as high as 8,000 feet in Colorado. The nests are usually in the lower branches of pines or oaks, often only a few feet above ground level.

Seasonality: Colorado records are from April 21 to October 29, while those from Wyoming are from May 7 to October 16, with peaks in May and September. In Montana and southern Alberta the birds arrive in early to mid-May, and are usually gone by mid-September. Colorado egg records are from May 30 to June 28, while in Wyoming and Montana active nests have been observed from mid-June to mid-July.

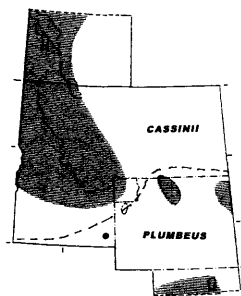
Suggested Reading: Barlow & Williams, 1970; Barclay, 1977; James, 1973.

LATILONG STATUS

S	S	s	
s	S	s	S
S	s	S	s

s	s		?
M	s	s	
	M		

M		M	s
	s	s	M
S	s	S	S



Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*)

Identification: This inconspicuous vireo is more often heard than seen, for it usually forages at considerable height in tall trees. It is mostly grayish green above, without wing-bars and with only an indistinct pale eye-stripe, which is not outlined in black. Its song is distinctively cadenced, a long warble that is regularly accented and typically ends on a strong emphatic note.

LATILONG STATUS

S	S	S	s
s	S	S	S
S	S	S	S

S	S	s	s
s	S	s	M
s	S	S	S

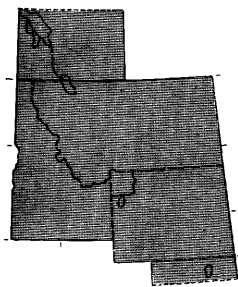
S	s	S	s
	S	S	S
s	S	s	S

Status: A summer resident in forests throughout the entire region, and fairly common in nearly all the montane parks, and probably breeding in all of them. Easily the most common and widespread vireo of the region.

Habitats and Ecology: Fairly open woodlands, especially of deciduous trees, are favored by this species. It is probably most common along riparian forests supporting tall trees, but also occurs in aspen groves, well wooded residential or park areas, especially where tall cottonwoods are present. In coniferous forest areas the birds favor areas where single or clumped broadleaved trees such as aspens or birches occur, and foraging is done near the crowns of fairly densely leaved trees, and nests are sometimes located as high as 90 feet above ground in very tall forests.

Seasonality: Colorado records extend from May 8 to October 1, and Wyoming records are from May 12 to October 28, with peaks in late May and September. In Montana and southern Alberta the birds usually arrive in mid-May, and depart in early to mid-September. Nest records in Colorado are from June 15 to July 29, while in Wyoming and Montana egg records are from June 15 to July 13.

Suggested Reading: James, 1976; Sutton, 1949; Dunham, 1964; Grinnell & Storer, 1924.



Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*)

Identification: A rather rare vireo of the region, limited to the area east of the mountains during the breeding season, and somewhat resembling a warbling vireo, but much more yellowish on the breast and underparts, and with a distinct black lower border to the white eye-stripe. The song is similar to that of the red-eyed vireo but is slower, higher-pitched, and consists of a series of mostly two-noted phrases with rather long pauses between phrases.

Status: A local summer resident in central Alberta south to about Cold Lake and Sundre. Otherwise a spring and fall migrant east of the mountains; reported as a vagrant in Banff, Jasper, and Yoho N.P.

Habitats and Ecology: Breeding habitats of this species include open deciduous woodlands such as regrowth areas of aspens and poplars, or secondary birch-poplar communities that have developed following logging of coniferous forests. The birds also occur in muskeg areas having willow or alder thickets around their edges.

Seasonality: There are few migration records for the area south of Canada, but probably the migration schedule is similar to that of the other vireos. In Alberta the birds arrive on their breeding grounds in late May and begin to move south the second half of August, with only stragglers remaining after the first week of September.

Comments: Like all vireos, this species is protectively colored to match the green to yellow-green half-shaded environment in which it is found, and in spite of the male's loud songs it may prove a frustrating job to actually see the bird among the foliage around it. Its small size and distinctly greenish yellow color makes this species even more difficult to see than the other vireos of the region, and its nests are usually very well camouflaged with lichens, birch bark, or similar materials.

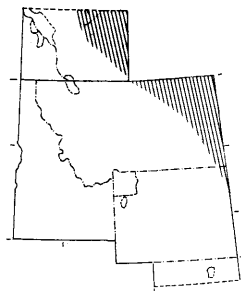
Suggested Reading: Barlow & Rice, 1977; Bent, 1950.

LATILONG STATUS

	?		
	V		

?	?		

		V	
			M



Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)

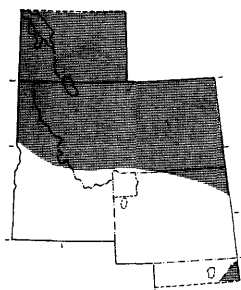
Identification: This is a fairly large but still inconspicuous vireo, without white wing-bars or eye-ring, but with a definite white eye-stripe bounded above and below with black. Its song is distinctive, a nearly continuous series of robin-like phrases given in a querulous manner, usually of three-noted series ("Got any eggs? Don't have any eggs . . ."), and endlessly repeated.

LATILONG STATUS

S	S	S	
s	S	S	s
S	S	S	s

S	s	s	s
M	s	M	S
	s		

M		M	M
	s	M	M
V	V		S



Status: A summer resident over the northern half of the region, and local farther south as a breeder or migrant. Largely limited to deciduous areas, and thus rare or occasional in most of the montane parks except Glacier N.P., where a common breeder.

Habitats and Ecology: This species is primarily associated with deciduous forests, especially those with semiopen canopies, and in the Rocky Mountain region is largely limited to broadleaved riparian forests in prairie areas, or to planted areas such as city parks and farmsteads, as well as aspen groves or poplars growing among conifers.

Seasonality: Colorado records are from May 8 to September 12, while in Wyoming the records extend from late May to November 2, and in Montana from mid-May to early September. In southern Alberta the birds usually arrive in late May, and are normally gone again by early September. Colorado egg dates are from June 22 to July 7, while Montana dates for active nests are from mid-June to early August.

Comments: This is one of the most widespread of the North American vireos and certainly one of the most frequently encountered in deciduous forests. It often nests fairly conspicuously in the horizontal forks of large trees, suspending its nest in the usual distinctive manner of vireos, and typically camouflaging it with lichens, bits of wasp nests, and similar items that are attached to spider webbing around its exterior.

Suggested Reading: Rice, 1978; Williamson, 1971; Southern, 1958; Lawrence, 1953a.