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## Virginia's Warblers in Kimball County

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### **Virginia's Warblers in Kimball County**

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This fall 2000 season was marked by a very westerly flavor to the passerine migration with many sightings of western warblers, vireos, and flycatchers in western Nebraska. Most notably, Townsend's Warblers and Cassin's Vireos were seen in good numbers. Additionally, three sightings of Virginia's Warbler and five of Dusky Flycatcher added to the excitement. In this note, we

report this fall's sightings of Virginia's Warbler and comment on the status of this species in Nebraska.

On 26 August 2000, Dinsmore observed a Virginia's Warbler (*Vermivora virginiae*) along the north side of Oliver Reservoir. He studied the bird at close range from 9:52-10:05 a.m. as it foraged with a large flock of migrant passerines. The identification of the bird as a Virginia's Warbler was straightforward. Features noted included the generally dull gray/brown plumage, slightly paler underparts with a very dull yellowish or buff patch at the center of the breast and bright yellow undertail coverts, conspicuous white eyering, plain, unmarked wings, and the nearly constant sideways flicking of the tail. On the basis of the brown tones to the plumage, dusky underparts, lack of a rufous cap, and only a faint hint of a yellow/buff breast patch, he concluded that the bird was an immature female Virginia's Warbler (see Dunn and Garrett 1997). Fontaine saw this individual briefly on 27 August in the same general area.

On 27 August 2000, Fontaine observed a Virginia's Warbler along the gravel road south of exit 1 off Interstate 80 in southwestern Kimball County. The bird was seen shortly after sunrise from 6:45-6:50 a.m. foraging in a stand of Limber Pine approximately 15 meters from the roadside. The Virginia's Warbler was in the company of a loose flock of migrants composed of Wilson's Warblers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and a Brown Thrasher. The bird was seen flicking its tail as it moved from tree to tree. Based on the clean gray breast and bold lemon yellow undertail coverts, he concluded the bird was an adult female.

The final sighting occurred on 3 September 2000 while we were birding together at Oliver Reservoir. From 9:35-9:40 a.m., we observed a Virginia's Warbler with a small flock of migrant passerines below the dam of Oliver Reservoir. The bird appeared in response to our pishing, and we studied it at a distance of no more than 15m. This individual differed markedly from the Virginia's Warbler we saw along the north side of Oliver Reservoir on 26-27 August. This bird was generally a vivid pearl gray color, except that the underparts were slightly paler (whiter). The plain gray head was unmarked except for a bold white eyering and at least a couple of rusty feathers on the crown (remnants of the rufous crown). The wings were plain and lacked any wingbars. The paler underparts were unmarked except for a bright yellow breast patch and bright yellow undertail coverts. The tail was gray as well. The bird spent most of its time perched motionless on a willow branch, although it did flick its tail sideways on at least a couple of occasions. On the basis of the very gray plumage, paler underparts, remnants of a rufous cap, and bright yellow color on the breast and undertail coverts, we concluded that the bird was an adult male Virginia's Warbler.

These records represent the third through fifth reports of Virginia's Warblers in Nebraska. Previous records were on 22 May 1995 at Morrill, Scotts Bluff County (Gubanyi 1996) and on 17 May 1998 at the Bushnell Cemetery, Kimball County (Silcock and Jorgensen 1998). The species has recently been found breeding in small numbers in the western Black Hills of South Dakota (Palmer 1998), and this population may be the source of the birds occurring in Nebraska. An alternative source population may be the Front Range in southeastern Wyoming and northern Colorado. Virginia's Warblers are annual migrants (mostly in spring) at Crow Valley Recreation Area in Weld County, Colorado. This location is approximately 40 km southwest of the southwestern corner of Kimball County. Given the annual status of this species on the well-birded eastern plains of Colorado and the paucity of observers in western Nebraska, we surmise that Virginia's Warblers occur annually in western Nebraska during spring and fall migration. Observers should be aware of this species when birding in the western portion of the state.

#### Literature Cited

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