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HERMIT WARBLER IN KNOX COUNTY: FIRST ACCEPTED RECORD
FOR NEBRASKA

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The 2002 Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Record Committee has reviewed the following record and accepted it as a Class III. This Knox County sighting constitutes the first confirmed record of Hermit Warbler in Nebraska.

On 15 May, 2002, while birding with Ben Brogie, we stopped at an isolated planting of mixed hardwoods and Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) on a high hill 5.5 miles north (Road 530) of Creighton. We noticed several birds moving among the branches along the roadside and upon "spishing" for just a few seconds we attracted a female Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*) and then an adult male Hermit Warbler (*Dendroica occidentalis*). I instantly recognized the second bird as a Hermit Warbler, having seen the species in California; but immediately got out a National Geographic Field Guide to show Ben the major characteristics of the species. We went over major field marks with the bird in view.

The male Hermit appeared slightly larger than the nearby Cape May and had a head which was completely yellow, except for a black throat and black on nape of neck which narrowed as it extended up to back of the crown. The eye was black and the bill dark. The upper chest was black while the lower chest, belly, and flanks were white. The upper back appeared grayish. The wings also were grayish, with two very noticeable white wing bars, the wing tips looking at times to have a bluish-green shine. The under tail coverts were white, as were the outer tail feathers.

The tail of the bird showed a bit of black at the lower end of the upper surface. The birds legs were dark.

The bird was in view for about five minutes, feeding among the branches of Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*) before flying back into the pines. We walked back into the pine grove and spotted the bird as it fed near the top of a pine. Once again it flew, and after failing to find the bird in the next few minutes I drove home to get my camera and CD player. I returned within 30 minutes and played a recording of a Hermit Warbler song. Within a minute or two, the bird was back in view. I heard the bird vocalize once, in response to the CD, and its call matched the Hermit Warbler song of Track 29b--song 6CA of Stokes--Field Guide to Bird Song--Western. I was able to approach the bird to within 20 feet with the light directly behind me. The colors of the bird stood out perfectly at times as it moved to the outer branches of different trees. The bird stayed in view for ten minutes or more, and I was able to take several photographs.

Unfortunately, after processing only two photographs turned out, both at some distance; they are therefore questionable as to stand-alone documentation. I returned to the site for the next several days; and although the female Cape May Warbler continued to be present, we could not relocate the Hermit Warbler.

Sharpe et al. (2001) list Hermit Warbler as hypothetical in Nebraska; with the only published report of two birds seen on 21 September, 1973 (Bassett 1974). Bray et al. (1986) also evaluated this report and stated the description of these birds "is not diagnostic."

Several states bordering Nebraska have documentation of Hermit Warbler.

Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming each have a single record:

Kansas: one collected near Holcomb, Finney County, on 7 May, 1964 (Thompson & Ely 1992)

Missouri: an immature male specimen from Nodaway County, 20 December, 1969 (Robbins & Easterla 1992)

Wyoming: one seen in Fontenelle Trap (Lincoln County), 26 May, 1990 (Scott 1993).

Colorado has multiple records for Hermit Warbler; seven of those from the Colorado plains with dates ranging from 27 April to 17 May (Andrews & Righter 1992). It is absent from the state lists of Iowa and South Dakota.

The Hermit Warbler is a species that could be expected again in Nebraska. It would most likely be encountered in western Nebraska conifers in May.

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