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Black-throated Gray Warbler at Oliver Reservoir

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On 1 May 1999, I was birding a point along the north shore of the lake when I encountered a small flock of Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers. At approximately 8:06 a.m. I was working my way through the flock when I heard a different chip note. The bird was feeding in a nearby tree, and I immediately recognized it as a male Black-throated Gray Warbler. I was able to study the bird at close range until 8:16 a.m. The bird was roughly the size of an Orange-crowned Warbler and was noticeably smaller and shorter-tailed than a Yellow-rumped Warbler. The head pattern was striking: solid black except for a yellow loreal spot, a white eyebrow, and a broad white whisker mark. The throat and upper breast were also black. The remainder of the underparts was white except for some darker streaking along the flanks. The mantle was gray and was slightly paler than the head. The wings were also gray with two narrow white wingbars. The tail was dark gray above and showed a lot of white when viewed from below. The warbler-like bill was short, thin, and dark-colored. The legs were also dark-colored. On the basis of the solid black throat, I concluded it was an adult male.

Surprisingly, this represents the first documented record of a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Nebraska. There are at least five previous reports of this species in Nebraska from May (3), August, and September. Black-throated Gray Warblers are annual migrants, mostly in spring, on the eastern plains of Colorado and future records can be expected from the Nebraska Panhandle.