

Slate-throated Redstart: Arizona's Fifth Record

KEITH KAMPER

This note documents the fifth record (pending acceptance by the Arizona Bird Committee) of an apparent adult (sex undetermined) Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*) for Arizona, a single bird photographed in Carr Canyon, Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, from 26 May to 5 June 2005. It provides comments on context, distribution, field identification, and information on the demise of this bird.

On 26 May visiting birder Dr. Larry King observed a redstart near the Comfort Springs Trail in Carr Canyon, exhibiting field marks consistent with Slate-throated Redstart. He described what he saw on the Tucson (Southeast Arizona) Rare Bird Alert voice mailbox; admirably, he did not call the bird a Slate-throated Redstart as his observation was very brief. On 28 May Phil Norton relocated and positively identified the bird in question as a Slate-throated Redstart. He observed the bird in a dry creek bed at about 2130 m (7000 ft), just off the Comfort Springs Trail near the head of the canyon. The bird was observed and photographed by many from 29 May through 5 June, at which date the bird was found dead. The redstart spent much of its time feeding actively in the vicinity of the dry creek bed, with observations ranging to a wet creek bed several hundred feet away. Second growth and mature Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and big-tooth maple (*Acer grandidentatum*) predominated; a few sapling white pines (*Pinus strobiformis*) were also present. The redstart carcass was found near the wet stream bed by Jay Hand.

Description and identification

Given adequate views, postjuvenile Slate-throated Redstart should not be confused with any other species. It is superficially similar to Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*) but was distinguished from that species by a combination of characteristics.

This bird's wings were completely slate gray, not black as in Painted Redstart. It lacked a white wing patch on the coverts and exhibited no white edges to the tertials; Painted shows both



Keith Kamper

Slate-throated Redstart 29 May 2005. Note chestnut patch on crown.

marks. The underparts and face were slate rather than jet black. The chestnut patch on the crown was visible at close range; this is lacking in the Painted Redstart. The bird did not exhibit the white arc under the eye that Painted Redstart shows. The red of the underparts was not as deep as Painted and was slightly more extensive. The tail often showed less white than Painted Redstart. White marks were present on retrices 4-6, with R6 showing the most extensive white, but it did not run the length of the tail as in Painted. Finally, the tail was slightly more graduated (Dunn and Garrett 1997).

The lack of any white on R3 led some to wonder if this bird might not be the most northerly subspecies: *miniatus*. Kimball L. Garrett, Ornithology Collections Manager, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, examined five reasonably unworn nominate *M. m. miniatus* (mainly from Chihuahua, Mexico) and four reasonably unworn *M. m. intermedius* (from Guatemala). While the sample size is too small to be scientific, the results showed that most unworn nominate (northern) birds show a trace of white on r3, but some may lack it (and many or most worn birds may not show white). There did not

appear to be any sexual dimorphism in this character. Garrett suggests that this bird is likely the expected nominate *miniatus* and that it falls within the normal range of variation of that subspecies.

Distribution and status

Slate-throated Redstart is largely resident from northern Mexico to South America (Howell and Webb 1995). Russell and Monson (1998) noted this species as a rare summer resident as far north as southern Sonora. Dunn et al. (2002) considers this species accidental in the U. S. Southwest. There are currently 12 accepted records for the United States in addition to this most current sighting. Arizona's four prior records are as follows: Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County 10-16 April 1976; Cave Creek Canyon, Chiricahua Mountains, Cochise County 2 May 1978; Cave Creek Canyon 29 March 1993; Madera Canyon, Santa Rita Mountains, Pima/Santa Cruz Counties 26 May 1996. New Mexico has one record, a single bird at Stevens Tank, Lea County 16 April 1962 (Dunn et al. 2002). Texas has seven accepted records from five counties. The



Keith Kamper

Shawneen Finnegan holds dead Slate-throated Redstart in southeastern Arizona's Carr Canyon 5 June 2005, shortly after it was found

first record occurred in April 1990; the most recent was in May 2003 (Mark Lockwood, letter to author, 27 July 2005).

Necropsy results

Larry L. Norris (2005), National Park Service and the University of Arizona (UA), reported that the specimen was examined by Greg Greene, Research Assistant, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. The right outer tail feather was the only missing flight feather. Fat was present in the furcular depression (wishbone area) and it weighed 7.9 grams. The bird was considered healthy. It suffered trauma to the back of the head and the right hip region consistent with an attack from above. It is likely that the bird was struck by a predator, possibly an accipiter. A Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) was observed in the area on 5 June, near where the carcass was found. The sex of the bird could not be determined because the blood and innards had pretty much turned to mush in the three days after it was found dead, because it could not be frozen prior to West Nile Virus (WNV) testing. Due to a massive hematoma in the hip and rump area it was not possible to dissect there. The Arizona Veterinary Diagnostic Lab test for WNV was negative. The carcass was destroyed during the WNV testing and necropsy (Norris, letter to author, 27 July 2005).

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4261 N. Windridge Loop, Tucson, AZ 85749
keith_kamper@comcast.net