

General Field Notes

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First Record of MacGillivray's Warbler for North Carolina

Kelly Davis

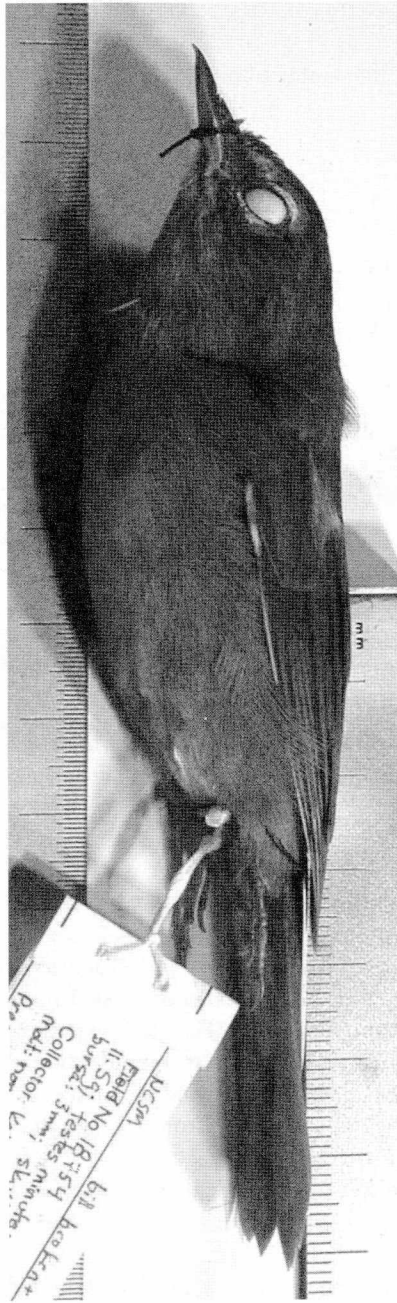
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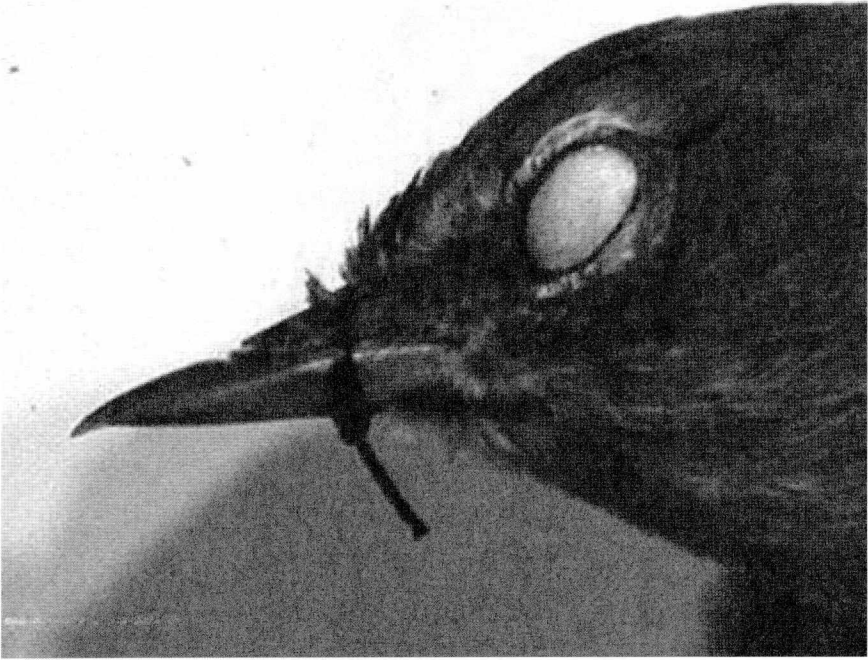
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On 6 November 1998, Davis found a freshly road-killed warbler of the genus *Oporornis* at her residence adjacent to US 64, near Lake Mattamuskeet, Hyde County, N.C. Three days later she told Fussell about the specimen, which she had placed in a freezer at the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge office. Fussell suggested the bird might be a MacGillivray's Warbler (*O. tolmiei*), in part because of the late date, and he transported the specimen to the Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter in Morehead City, where it was stored until picked up by John Gerwin and Becky Browning of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. The bird has been added to the collection of the Museum (NCSM # 19754).

Description of the bird: Our initial impression of the bird was that it was definitely an *Oporornis*, because of the hooded look and the presence of an eye ring or crescents (see below). However, it appeared to be much smaller and trimmer than a Connecticut Warbler (*O. agilis*). The coloration of the upperparts (excluding the head) and the tail were olive, except the primaries were slightly darker. There were no wingbars. The bird had a definite hood, with the head, throat, and extreme upper breast being gray (the center of the throat was slightly paler). The hood was quite conspicuous but was lighter than that depicted for adult males in the various field guides. The underparts, including the undertail coverts, were yellow, except for a slight olive wash on the flanks. There were whitish eye crescents above and below the eye, which would have been conspicuous in the field. The upper mandible was dark gray. The lower mandible was gray-brown and lighter than the upper mandible. The legs were pinkish.



MacGillivray's Warbler



Close-up showing the eye crescents of the MacGillivray's Warbler

The specimen was weighed and measured at the Wildlife Shelter and later at the State Museum. It was dissected at the State Museum and found to be an immature male, with light fat. The bird weighed 11.8 grams. Two measurements particularly relevant to species identification were: the length of the portion of rectrices extending beyond the undertail coverts was 20.5 mm; and the length of the tail subtracted from the length of wing (in a flattened position) was 11mm (61mm - 50mm).

Points considered in the identification of the bird, and the separation of it from Connecticut Warbler and Mourning Warbler (*O. philadelphia*), are summarized below:

Presence of eye crescents. This bird had well-defined, rather wide, eye crescents, one above the eye and one below. They did not extend in front of and behind the eye (there was not a complete eye ring). Dunn and Garrett (1997) caution that some Connecticut Warblers, at least in fall, can have a break in the rear portion of the eye ring and that female and immature Mourning Warblers

have a "variable thin broken eye ring or eye arcs." However, neither of these variations match the appearance of the eye crescents of the bird in question.

Absence of definite yellow color on the throat/presence of definite hood. According to Dunn and Garrett, most immature Mourning Warblers show yellow or yellow-buff on the throat. This was not the case with the specimen. Further, according to Dunn and Garrett, most immature Mourning Warblers do not have a complete hood (or breast band): The yellow color of the throat is connected to the yellow of the lower breast and belly. Again, this was not the case with the specimen in question.

Weight of the specimen. The bird weighed 11.8 grams. The bird had light fat but was not emaciated. Further, it was probably found before it had become severely dehydrated. So, it is probably not unreasonable to use this weight as an approximation of the weight of a live bird. Based on a sample of weights for MacGillivray's, Mourning, and Connecticut warblers (Dunning 1984), this specimen is almost certainly not a Connecticut Warbler. The average weight of that species is 15.2 grams. However, Mourning and MacGillivray's Warblers are more similar in size (although MacGillivray's average smaller); the weight of the specimen was consistent with either species.

The length of portion of the rectrices extending beyond undertail coverts. This measurement, 20.5 mm, strongly indicates that the bird is a MacGillivray's. For MacGillivray's the average length of this extension is 22 mm (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The Connecticut Warbler has a rather short tail that extends only about 10 mm beyond the undertail coverts. The Mourning Warbler is intermediate – the average length of the extension of the tail past the undertail coverts is 15 mm.

Length of the tail subtracted from the length of the flattened wing. For this specimen, this value was 11mm (61mm - 50mm). This value rules out Connecticut Warbler (range of 19-27 mm, see Pyle *et al.* 1987) but is consistent with either MacGillivray's Warbler or Mourning Warbler: The range for MacGillivray's is 10-12 mm (rarely to 15 mm), and the range for Mourning is 10-18 mm.

Summary

We are confident that the specimen is a MacGillivray's Warbler. Of the two similar species, Connecticut is easiest to rule out. This species can be eliminated from consideration based on the last two measurements discussed above (length of portion of rectrices extending beyond undertail coverts, and length of tail subtracted from length of flattened wing). Further, although Connecticut Warblers may rarely have broken eye rings, they never have broad eye crescents such as was the case with our bird. Separating MacGillivray's Warbler from Mourning Warbler is somewhat more difficult, especially in regard to morphometric data, because these two species are more similar in size. However, the length of the rectrices extending past the undertail coverts strongly indicates that the specimen is a MacGillivray's Warbler and not a Mourning. Further, the lack of a yellowish throat and presence of a complete

hood are much more consistent with the bird being a MacGillivray's Warbler and not a Mourning. Perhaps the best evidence that our bird was a MacGillivray's Warbler is the well-defined eye crescents. Although Mourning Warblers may have a thin broken eye ring, they do not have well-defined eye crescents as was the case with the specimen.

In March 1999, the specimen was examined by Dennis Paulson (Director, Slater Museum of Natural History, Tacoma, Washington), who is familiar with the species. He concurred with the identification of the specimen.

This represents the first record of this western species in North Carolina. However, an unidentified *Oporornis* was reported on the Ocracoke Island Christmas Bird Count on 30 December 1989 (*American Birds* 44:539, 702). If that bird were indeed an *Oporornis*, it was probably a MacGillivray's Warbler. Elsewhere in the Southeast, the species has been reported at least twice in both Florida and Georgia (Dunn and Garrett 1997; survey of *American Birds/Field Notes* through Volume 53, No. 4). One of the Georgia reports was of a bird measured and banded (at Jekyll Island). In Massachusetts, there are several reports of this species in recent years. At Cape May New Jersey, a bird found on November 12 lingered until January 10 (1997-1998).

Literature Cited:

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- Dunning, John, Jr. 1984. *Body weights of 686 species of North American birds*. Western Bird Banding Association, Monograph No. 1.
- Pyle, Peter, Steve Nowell, Robert Yunick, and David DeSante. 1987. *Identification Guide to North America Passerines*. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California.

Carolinabirds

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