

General Field Notes

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, significant nesting records, or summaries of such items.

First, second, or third sightings of species in either state must be submitted to the appropriate Bird Records Committee prior to publication in The Chat.

First Documented Records for Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) in North Carolina

Harry E. LeGrand, Jr.

NC Natural Heritage Program, 1601 MSC, Raleigh, NC 27699-1601

Although most states had records of Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) by the end of the 20th Century, North Carolina did not have its first convincing sight record of this western thrush until December 2005 in Orange County (Travis 2007). Unfortunately, the observer was unable to get photos of the bird, and other observers failed to see the bird in an attempt to obtain permanent photographic documentation.

A few years later in early 2010, there was a remarkable flurry of records of Varied Thrush from the eastern Piedmont and the mountains: three sightings, each photographed, all in a span of six weeks. Details of these records follow.

Harnett County Record

On 2 January 2010, Angie and William DeLozier observed an unfamiliar bird, somewhat like an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) but unfamiliar to them, in their yard near Chalybeate Springs in northern Harnett County. They first saw it on a tree branch about 5 m high. The bird then flew to the ground to scratch and flew back to another branch only 2 m off the ground. They watched the bird for about 10 minutes before it flew off. Fortunately, William DeLozier was able to obtain several photographs (Figure 1).

The bird was about the size of an American Robin, with a bright orange chest and belly and a strong black band across the chest. It showed an orange eyebrow. It was also spotted along the flanks, and the back had a bluish tinge. After checking a field guide, the couple identified the bird as a Varied Thrush.

Several birders tried to relocate the bird a day or two later but were unsuccessful. However, a dying Varied Thrush was found on 30 January near Angier, roughly 8 km to the east of Chalybeate Springs (*vide* Becky

Desjardins). The thrush was turned over to the NC Museum of Natural Sciences, where it was made into a cataloged specimen: NCSM 23439, Ad. Male, 31 January 2010, locality as follows: NC: Harnett Co.; Angier, within 0.75 mile of 150 West Rd. In all likelihood, this specimen was the bird seen by the DeLoziers.



Figure 1. Varied Thrush photographed 2 Jan 2010 at Chalybeate Springs, Harnett County, North Carolina. Photo by Angie and Bill DeLozier.

Henderson County Record

Charles and Lorene Gudger saw an unfamiliar bird in their yard in Fletcher, Henderson County, on 1 February 2010. It was feeding on cracked corn under a feeder in the yard, which had snow on the ground. As with the Harnett County record, they observed the bird for about 10 minutes and obtained several photos (Figure 2). They sent the photos via the internet to a friend in Nevada, who identified the bird as a Varied Thrush. One to several birders made an unsuccessful attempt to relocate this bird.

The bird they observed was the size of an American Robin, with an orange-yellow throat and wing marking. As with the first report of the winter, photos seem to indicate an adult male Varied Thrush. The Henderson County record is a first for the mountains of North Carolina.



Figure 2. Varied Thrush photographed 1 Feb 2010 in Fletcher, Henderson County, North Carolina. Photo by Lorene Gudger.

Alamance County Record

A third Varied Thrush was reported barely two weeks after the Henderson County sighting. Steve Wedge, an experienced birder, immediately identified the thrush in his yard in Mebane, in eastern Alamance County, on 13 February 2010. Unlike with the other two records, this bird was clearly not an adult male and likely was an immature bird, perhaps a female. Also unlike the other two sightings, a few dozen birders were able to converge on this new residential neighborhood within an hour or two, although it took several hours of searching for all present to see the bird. It flew from tree to tree in the neighborhood, mainly perching 3-10 m up in bare hardwoods; however, it was not seen to forage in these trees. In fact, it was never seen feeding.

This thrush was perhaps slightly smaller than an American Robin and slightly chunkier. The long creamy to salmon-colored stripe over the eye extended back toward the nape, immediately setting the bird apart from a robin. The under parts showed a salmon-colored throat, a narrow dark gray breast band, and pale salmon-colored breast and belly. The lower under parts were a bit scaled or scalloped with darker markings, but these markings were scarcely visible at a distance. The upper parts and most of the wings, including the side of the head, were a soft gray-brown. There were many

conspicuous salmon-colored patches on the wing. The two wing bars appeared somewhat spotted rather than appearing in broad bands. There was also a notable salmon-colored patch distal to the second band, and the closed primaries and secondaries contained much of this salmon color as well. The tail was rather short to moderate but was not as long as that of an American Robin. The bill was that of a typical thrush although its color was not obvious.

Documentation of this bird was made by photos taken by Derb Carter (Figure 3) and Bert Fisher. Other observers of the thrush included the author, Ricky Davis, Wayne Irvin, Jeff Pippen, Will Cook, Keith Camburn, and Taylor Piephoff, among 8 to 10 others. The thrush was seen again on the following day but not after 14 February.



Figure 3. Varied Thrush photographed 13 Feb 2010 at Mebane, Alamance County, North Carolina. Photo by Derb Carter.

Discussion

The Varied Thrush breeds from Alaska south to California along the West Coast and inland to Alberta and Montana. Most individuals migrate southward to winter in the western states, but a few individuals are seen each winter in the eastern states, more frequently in the Northeast than in the Southeast. Most notably, Virginia had 11 records prior to North Carolina's first in 2005 (Rottenborn and Brinkley 2007). South Carolina and Georgia each had several records prior to 2005 as well.

There was a noteworthy invasion of Varied Thrush into the Mid-Atlantic States during the winter of 2009-2010, as summarized by Brinkley (2010). He noted that eight individuals were reported between Pennsylvania and North Carolina, considerably more than the usual number. As nearly all were at feeders or in backyards, he speculates that severe cold may have pushed birds farther south than usual, and that heavy snow may have brought them in to feeders. Of the five records away from North Carolina, one was from South Carolina (on 15 February) (Blankenship and Southern 2010) and another was from Virginia (from 5 February to the end of the month) (Adams and Hafner 2010).

All three reports from 2010 were accepted by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee (LeGrand et al. 2011). The specimen immediately elevated the species from the Provisional List to the Official List. Acceptance of each photo would also have elevated the species to the Official List.

Literature Cited

Adams, M. T., and M. Hafner. 2010. Middle Atlantic. *North American Birds* 64:239.

Blankenship, K., and J. Southern. 2010. Southern Atlantic. *North American Birds* 64:243.

Brinkley, E.S. 2010. Gulls and living rooms. *North American Birds* 64:213-222.

LeGrand, H.E., Jr. (Chair), K.E. Camburn, S. Cooper, R.J. Davis, E.V. Dean, W.K. Forsythe, J.S. Pippen, M.H. Tove, and R.L. Tyndall. 2011. 2010 annual report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee. *Chat* 75:1-5.

Rottenborn, S.C., and E. S. Brinkley. 2007. Virginia's Birdlife: an annotated checklist. *Virginia Society of Ornithology, Virginia Avifauna* No. 7.

Travis, G. 2007. A Varied Thrush in Orange County: first record for North Carolina. *Chat* 71:78-80.

Received 27 December 2012, accepted 01 February 2013