

# MacGillivray's Warbler in Kane County: second state record

by Scott Cohrs

Sometimes having no plan is the best plan. I had spent numerous mornings during May of 2006 birding local migrant traps with limited success. My personal sightings consisted of both low migrant numbers and relatively little species diversity. I wasn't sure if this was due to weather patterns or my bad luck, but I knew time for this spring migration was running out.

On the morning of 21 May 2006, I decided to poke around the northern part of Kane County. At the very least, I felt I had a chance to see a Swainson's Hawk in that area. On the way, I ran into a very good pocket of warblers during a few hours at Burnidge Forest Preserve. After a fruitless search for the Swainson's Hawk, I headed out to look for Western Meadowlarks at the local sod farms. Only as I was driving by Hampshire Forest Preserve did I decide to stop for a quick walk.

Hampshire Forest Preserve was loaded with birds that morning. Thrushes and flycatchers were particularly numerous. After an hour I had completed a circle and was headed back to my car. At the last trail intersection I stopped to look through a pocket of warblers moving through the low shrubs along the path. After a couple of minutes, a small *Oporornis* warbler popped up onto the branch of a pine tree about 15 feet away. It was initially viewed head on and I thought I was looking at another Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*). Then the bird turned and showed off its prominent white eye arcs. I immediately began to register all the field marks I could on the bird.

Thinking that I was possibly looking at a MacGillivray's Warbler (*O. tolmei*), I was careful in my observation. The most obvious feature was the white eye arcs. These were thick white crescents above and below the eye. They did not connect in a continuous ring. The bird possessed very dark lores between the eye and bill. A gray hood encircled the head of the bird and a black bib was present on the front. The rest of the plumage was yellow below and olive/yellow on the back. The tail appeared relatively long. After about 10 minutes, the bird flew across the path and I lost it.

Upon reaching the car, I took field notes and consulted the field guides I had with me. I also did further research when I arrived home. Though separating a MacGillivray's from an aberrant Mourning Warbler can be tricky, I had no doubt that the bird I had seen was a male MacGillivray's Warbler.

I posted the bird to the Illinois birding list that night. The next day, several people were able to relocate the bird. Though elusive, it was observed throughout the course of the day. By 23 May, the bird was gone.

After researching MacGillivray's Warbler records for Illinois, it appears that this may be the only live bird recorded for the state. The only previous record for Illinois was a specimen from Lewiston in Fulton County in May of 1915, originally misidentified as a Mourning Warbler (See Binford and DeSante 1993 and IORC 1915:001). I was not able to find any other accepted records for Illinois. There are also very few mentions of any other possible sightings in any literature that I could find.

This species breeds throughout much of western North America and winters from northern Mexico south to Panama. It migrates east casually to Minnesota, Missouri and Louisiana (DeSante and Pyle 1986).

Ironically, the weather feature that may have been responsible for a slow migration could also have contributed to the presence of the MacGillivray's Warbler. For most of May 2006, a low pressure system was anchored on top of the Chicago region (WGN Web site). West winds which were in place south of northeastern Illinois could have deflected numerous migrants further east than normal. The winds could also have dragged a vagabond western migrant, such as the MacGillivray's, eastward. It is also interesting to note that several MacGillivray's Warblers were seen further east than normal along the Texas coast (personal observation, TX listserve) during the 2006 migration. It's possible that a bird in this situation could have been deposited in northern Illinois with the southwest winds of 20 May.

## Literature Cited

Binford, L.C. and D. F. DeSante. 1993. First Illinois record of MacGillivray's Warbler with a summary of eastern North American records and notes on identification. *Meadowlark* 2: 47-50.

DeSante, D. and P. Pyle. 1986. Distributional checklist of North American Birds, Vol. 1, United States and Canada. Published by the authors. Artemisia Press, Lee Vining, CA.

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