



Grace's Warbler at Montrose: First record east of Colorado and western Texas

by John Purcell

Over the years, the Montrose area of Lincoln Park in Chicago has attracted many rare birds. At about 7:40 a.m., 8 September 2003, this birding hot spot hosted yet another rarity.

Clara Coen and I were birding the eastern end of Montrose Point when we noticed a warbler-like bird in the small trees. My first thought was Yellow-throated Warbler, a good find at Montrose. The bird had a yellow throat with two white wing bars as does a Yellow-throated, but after some searching through a National Geographic field guide, we discovered that the bird most closely matched the picture and description of a Grace's Warbler (*Dendroica graciae*). This bird had a broad, yellow supraloral; the Yellow-throated Warbler has a white supercilium. Grace's also may have a short white section near the bill at the end of the yellow supercilium (Dunn and Garrett 1997). This bird also lacked the black auriculars as well as the white neck spot that a Yellow-throated Warbler has. Still, I found it difficult to believe that a Grace's Warbler, a western species, would be in Chicago.

Fortunately, at that point, Alex Meloy arrived, and while he kept track of the bird, I went looking for Kanae Hirabayashi. I found her and Rita Torrado on the beach and told them of the possible Grace's

Warbler. We hastily returned to the Point. Alex still had the bird in view, which was now rapidly moving, and Kanae began photographing it. Meanwhile, Clara called Bob Hughes on her cell phone, and he soon arrived and was also able to get pictures. The photos taken by birders were a big help in clinching the identification of this warbler, which has a much more petite bill compared with the Yellow-throated, giving it a more rounded head appearance. After awhile the Grace's Warbler moved into the taller trees and became difficult to see. In a few hours it disappeared from view and was not seen again. Migrants seen in the vicinity of the Grace's Warbler included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Connecticut Warbler and Philadelphia Vireo (pers. comm. J. Niland).

Not only is this a first state record for Grace's Warbler, but also a first record for this species east of the Mississippi River. The Peterson Field Guide (1997) states the Grace's Warbler is "unrecorded in the U.S. east of Colorado and west Texas," and that the species is "casual in fall on the southern California coast, the 15 records are mainly in September."

Curson et al. (1994) state the Grace's Warbler is a rare vagrant to California and Texas, which is just west (California) and east (Texas) of its breeding range.

Grace's Warbler breeds in the high elevation mountains of Arizona, New Mexico, southwest Colorado,

southern Utah and southeast Nevada and the western corner of Texas. They breed in open forests of tall pines, especially Ponderosa pines. They winter primarily in the highlands of Mexico.

This species is of moderate conservation importance, because of its relatively small and patchy distribution, and its restriction to mature coniferous forests, according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (see <http://birds.cornell.edu/bfl/speciesaccts/grawar.html>). Populations are not well monitored in any part of its range, and habitat requirements are poorly known, according to the Web site.

The Illinois Ornithological Records Committee recently accepted this species to the Illinois accidental list (Stotz and Johnson 2004).

Literature Cited

Curson, J., D. Quinn and D. Beadle. 1994. Warblers of the Americas. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA. 252 pp.

Dunn, J. and K. Garrett. 1997. A field guide to warblers of North America. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, MA. 656 pp.

Stotz, D.F. and D. B. Johnson. 2004. Tenth Report of the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee. Meadowlark 13: 54-58.

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Grace's Warbler at Montrose Point, Cook County. 8 September 2003. Photo by Kanae Hirabayashi.