

Species: BLUE-HEADED VIREO  
 Record No. 629-03-03

Location: HQ MALHEUR NWR  
 County: HARNEY  
 Date(s): MAY 25, 2003

| Reporters       | details | slides | prints | tapes |
|-----------------|---------|--------|--------|-------|
| GREG GILLSON    | A       |        |        |       |
| SYLVIA MAUKDING | B       |        |        |       |
| MARK NIKAS      | C       |        |        |       |
| ALAN CONTRERAS  | D       |        | E-F    | (CD)  |
| VJERA ARNOLD    | G       |        |        |       |

Specimen no. & location \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Accepted 9-0 Not accepted \_\_\_\_\_  
 verified \_\_\_\_\_ origin questionable \_\_\_\_\_  
 Single rept. sighting  exotic not estab. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Multiple rept. sighting \_\_\_\_\_

Records split \_\_\_\_\_ Records combined \_\_\_\_\_

**Disposition**

Secretary's File Duplicate File  
 Main File A-B-C-D-E-F-G details A-B-C-D-E-F-G  
 Slide File \_\_\_\_\_ slides \_\_\_\_\_  
 Print File \_\_\_\_\_ prints \_\_\_\_\_  
 Tape File \_\_\_\_\_ tapes \_\_\_\_\_

Date reporter(s) notified: 4-19-05

**Subject: rare bird report: Blue-headed Vireo****Date:** Thursday, May 29, 2003 11:06 AM**From:** greg.gillson@exgate.tek.com**To:** <hnehls@teleport.com>**Cc:** <greg@thebirdguide.com>

Harry,

After further research, I feel that the vireo at refuge headquarters Sunday morning, May 25, was, in fact, Blue-headed.

Unfortunately, while I wondered about it when I saw the bird, I didn't spend enough time studying it and delayed writing the description until today (May 29). I did write the description this morning prior to re-reading Heindel's article (Birding, Vol. 26, No. 6, December 1996) just now.

**DESCRIPTION:** Obvious vireo: four-and-a-half inches long, thin but slightly arched hooked bill, short straight tail, greenish-gray above, white below, eye ring, wing bars, slow deliberate movements, simple song. Head hooded with dark slate blue-gray, including crown, nape, and ear coverts. Slate of head sharply and strongly contrasting with white throat and greenish side of neck/back. Bold, white eye ring and supraloral. Black bill and dark eye. Throat, breast, belly, vent, and under tail coverts clean white. Bright yellow or yellow-green isolated flank patches. Voice loud, clear deliberate brief rising and falling phrases, well separated, not rough.

**VIEW:** Viewed for maybe a minute or two total over a 15-minute period about 8 AM, primarily in the low canopy above me against bright overcast. I was 15-25 feet away with 8x binoculars. I didn't get a clear view of the center of the back, rump, or upper tail. The high contrast against the sky made determining wing edging color unreliable.

**LOCATION:** Moved slowly in the shorter trees along the entire west side of Malheur NWR headquarters, from the residence road down to the lake edge of the trees.

**EXPERIENCE:** I see or hear only a handful of Cassin's Vireos annually; I have identified a couple of birds in SE Oregon as Plumbeous Vireos; no prior experience with Blue-headed Vireos. I can identify the voice as "Solitary Vireo" but don't have the experience necessary to separate the songs. The voice seemed louder and perhaps clearer than Cassin's Vireo, which I heard 3 weeks prior.

**DISCUSSION AFTER RE-READING HEINDEL'S ARTICLE IN BIRDING:**

**SEPARATION WITH PLUMBEOUS VIREO:** The bright yellow and green in the plumage, clearly defined hood, eliminated all thoughts of Plumbeous Vireo.

**SEPARATION WITH CASSIN'S VIREO:** This was not the typical green-headed, Hutton's-like, Cassin's Vireo I am used to seeing. The dark gray head, sharply separated from white throat and green on sides of neck, along with small yellow flank patches, and no dusky green on the sides of the breast, seem to clinch the ID. The lack of any greenish on the nape strongly indicates that this was a male.

Greg Gillson  
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629-03-03B

## Blue-headed Vireo

1. Sylvia Maulding  
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2. ID: Blue-headed Vireo, one adult in fresh spring plumage.

3. DATE: May 25, 2003

4. LOCATION: Malheur NWR, Harney County.  
Seen at Headquarters in the southwest corner. Observed twice first in low bushy tree and then a higher bare branch of another tree.

5. DETAILS: I first saw the Vireo in a low bush, First I had a head view and then a nice side view. I was surprised by the dark blue/gray head and how the spectacle stood out. When I saw the side the yellow on the flanks was very bright. The bird had two whitish wing bar, a white throat and belly. I thought I had a Blue-headed Vireo.

The Vireo flew away from me and I followed it. I came upon Roy Gerig and asked him if he had seen a Blue-headed Vireo. Roy said he had just seen a Vireo that he thought was too bright for a Cassin's and was probably my bird. I got the Sibley Guide to Birds while Roy looked for the bird.

Roy and I looked for and finally refound the bird a little higher in a tree. It was perched on a bare branch in full sun. Roy and I got a good look at the back and head. We were both struck by the green back and contrasting dark head. We compared the bird to the pictures in Sibley and it was clear to us that the bird was a Blue-headed Vireo.

When I first saw the Blue-headed Vireo it was with a Cassin's Vireo. While trying to relocate it I saw a couple of Cassin's Vireos. One was a bright bird but the head was only a little darker than the back. The Blue-headed was very hooded looking.

I have seen Blue-headed Vireos in Florida. The bird did not vocalize while I was watching it.

I observed the Blue-headed Vireo with Swarovski 8 1/2 X 42 binoculars. It was about 10:30 in the morning and the light was good. When I first saw the Vireo in the small bushy tree it was about four foot from the ground on the south side of the bush. It feed and moved from the southeast side to the southwest side of the bush. I was about 15 feet away when I first spottedthe Vireo and moved closer while watching it.

Sylvia Maulding (sylviabird@worldnet.att.net)  
Springfield

629-03-03 C

## Blue-headed Vireo

On 5/25/03 I observed a Blue Headed Vireo at the Malheur NWR headquarters property, Harney County, OR. The bird was first observed high in the trees there and later at eye level in shrubs from 20 feet. The bird was obviously a vireo of the "Solitary" family with its bold white eye ring and "spectacles". It had a short, stout bill and 2 prominent whitish wing bars. The head, face and nape were all a medium-dark gray contrasting sharply with the bright white throat and upper breast and the paler olive-green back. The facial or auricular area was as dark a gray as the head and showed no green feathering. This area contrasted sharply with the white throat. The upperparts were all an even green. Below the bird was white with bright yellow flanks and breast sides. The white below was noticeable brighter on the throat and upper breast. No green or gray tones were visible on the flanks or sides. The wing bars appeared white but at close range with good light there was a faint yellow cast to them. There was a black bar between the white ones. The flight feathers and tail were black with yellow-green edges, almost white on the tail feathers. The bird sang and although I could tell it was different in quality from the Cassin's I'm used to hearing I really couldn't describe what that difference was - perhaps a little clearer or sweeter.

At the time I consulted the Sibley and National Geographic Bird Guides. At home I consulted the Dec. 1996 issue of "Birding" which contains a fine ID article on Solitary Vireos. No photos were taken.

I am familiar with all 3 "Solitary Vireo" species having lived and birded in the normal range of each. I had returned from a week in upstate New York just 9 days prior where I daily observed Blue-Headed Vireos on territory from the deck of my brother's home in the Adirondack's. This bird seemed to me to be a Blue-Headed Vireo from the moment I saw it. I've seen Cassin's Vireos with a noticeable head and neck contrast before but not as extreme as in this bird. Such contrasty Cassin's are normally seen in the fall when they are in fresh plumage. Spring Solitary Vireos should all be in worn plumage when Cassin's are more likely to be confused with Plumbeous rather than Blue-Headed.

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## OBRC Rare Bird Report

FROM:

Alan Contreras  
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SPECIES: Blue-headed Vireo

DATE: May 25, 2003

LOCATION: Malheur HQ, Harney Co.

DETAILS: Solitary-type vireo with very bright color and sweet, buzz-free song. Head was quite dark gray except slight olive in lower center of nape. Typical "Solitary" facial spectacles, but I did not pay careful attention to them. Likewise vireo bill, rather heavy. No olive on face, top of head or sides of face. Sharp cutoff between gray head and white throat. Underparts quite white except for bright yellow sides, which extended across the vent in a wide bar of yellow easily visible from below. Back dark olive-green, wings similar with pale bars. Tail dark olive-gray with white edges to some feathers, visible in the field when the bird was landing and partially visible in photo 1 (attached as print, CD and on Noah Strycker's web site). Noah will mail my original photos directly to OBRC.


Song was clear and sweet, devoid of any buzzy notes, unlike typical Cassin's and similar in tone to a Red-eyed Vireo that we saw and heard the same weekend. To me the Red-eyed sounded a little higher, but the tone quality was very similar. No "zreer" notes at all in multiple songs heard from the Blue-headed. We listened to tapes of Cassin's and BH later that day and the following day and have no doubt at all that what we heard matched the Blue-headed and did not match the Cassin's.

Also seen and heard by Hendrik Herlyn, Daniel Farrar, Mark Nikas and Sylvia Maulding, who concur in the i.d. Nikas notes attached. Many other observers saw and heard the bird but there was disagreement as to what it was, partly because few heard it sing.

PHOTOS, RECORDINGS: two poor photos by me attached. I know of no others. No sound records known to me.

DATE: June 23, 2003

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_





BLUE-HEADED VIREO

H<sub>9</sub> MACHEOR NWR

MAY 23, 2003

ALAN CONTRERAS

629-03-03 E





BLUE-HEADED VIREO

HQ MALHEOR NWR

MAY 23, 2003

ALAN CONTRERAS

629-03-03 F

## BLUE-HEADED VIREO

The bird seen was one (1) Blue-headed Vireo.

The date was May 25, 2003.

The location was at Malheur Headquarters. I saw it in an evergreen tree, about 10 feet off the ground. It came to the front of the tree briefly, in sunlight.

I knew there was a bright vireo around, so I was looking for vireos. Right before I saw the bright one, I saw a Cassin's, which looked very dull. Then the bright one showed up.

I heard it singing first. The song was in a similar pattern to Cassin's - slow and up and down (dududu, didudu), so I knew it was a vireo. I am also familiar with the other common birds that sing in similar patterns, such as Western Tanager, American Robin, and Black-headed Grosbeak (it was too slow and separated for all of these). I didn't notice it as being raspy. Later I learned that Cassin's are raspier than Blue-headed.

I then spotted it in a tree 20-30 feet in front of me. I got closer. The sun was behind me. I was using Pentax 8x42 binoculars. The bird was moving slowly through the branches of the evergreen, feeding. It fed in typical vireo fashion, sitting for a moment, then moving, then sitting again. At one point it came out in the open on a small dead tree, with no leaves obscuring it. It sat there long enough to get a good look at it, but not longer than a minute or two. It was upright while it was perched.

It was the same size and shape as a Cassin's: slightly larger and chunkier than a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, with a vireo bill (thicker and not as pointy as a kinglet or warbler bill, but not as wide at the base as an empid bill), big head, short tail, wingbars. However the sides were much more yellow than the Cassin's I'd just seen. It also had a blue-ish gray head and a greenish back, both of which were more vivid than the Cassin's head and back. There was almost a clear distinction between the head and back where the bluegray and green met. I also noticed that the throat was very white. It had a bright white spectacle eye-ring.

629-03-03 G

After it left I immediately looked at Sibley's Western Guide, which has Cassin's and Blue-headed side by side. The comment that some individuals can overlap was very worrying at first. Mary Anne Sohlstrom also saw the bird at the same time I did. We figured out from Sibley that for the time of bright plumage, Blue-headed is supposed to be bright in the spring, while Cassin's is supposed to be bright in the fall, which certainly fit with the Cassin's I saw. I have never seen a Blue-headed before, but I have seen many Cassin's Vireos.

Vjera Arnold

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