

Callie Gesmundo

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Plumbeous Vireo

Adult (after hatch year undergoing pre-basic molt), unknown sex

Dates

August 3rd, 2017 (8:44am – 12:12pm) Some haze early, then full sun, mid 60s to high 70s

August 5th, 2017 (9:26 – 11:31) Sunny, high 70s to low 80s.

Location

August 3rd, 2017 - Harney County, Page Springs Campground. Foraging between two tall cottonwood trees in campsite 32. After 45 minutes moved south ~200m to other smaller cottonwood trees within campground, then back to cottonwoods in site 32.

August 5th, 2017 - Harney County, Page Springs Campground. First located on hillside at entrance of wilderness trail, foraging in juniper tress. Followed up to plateau above campground, continuing to forage and sing in junipers, then eventually returned back to base of campground, singing in mid canopy of juniper.

Details

This bird was slightly larger than nearby Warbling Vireo with a stockier, heavy bodied shape unlike a warbler. The bill black bill is thicker than Warbling Vireo with bluish gray base.

The striking slate gray upperparts extend from the back onto the head and have a faint transition to grayish olive on the lower rump.

The stark white underparts and throat, which contrast significantly with the saturated gray back and head, extended onto the belly. Non-uniform dusky patches on undersides indicate incomplete body molt, which corresponds with symmetrical flight feather replacement. Flanks are white to pale dusky with very faint yellowish-olive wash on lower flanks. Undertail coverts are completely white.

Fresh basic greater and lesser coverts show extensive white tipping on gray feathers giving the bird bold white wing bars. Primaries are actively molting, with a few inner secondaries yet to be replaced. These feathers are brown and worn, with no evident edging-color apparent. However, the newly replaced tertials and the complete/nearly complete outer secondaries are gray with crisp solid white edging.

Head is a solid gray (matching the back color) with a strong and striking demarcation between the gray head and white throat. A bold white supraloral strip connects to a nearly complete, large eyering only broken by a dark loreal mark giving the bird a classic "spectacled" appearance known to Solitary Vireos.

The relative tail length of this bird was hard to judge due to active molt. Tail appeared incomplete in r1-r6, but feathers have broad white edging apparent on all blackish retricies. Molt seems to have begun at r1 and progressed distally.

Eyes were dark/black, and legs were bluish gray.

Behavior

Bird was active, and very vocal. The bird was consistently seen moving and looking for insects at a slow and methodical pace, not hyper active, and often on the inner branches of juniper and cottonwood away from the periphery tips.

Song

The song was the first indication I had of the bird, and although it sounded similar to a Cassin's Vireo, the lower pitch was recognizable and noticeably different than a Cassin's Vireo.

Eliminating Similar Species

This vireo clearly falls within the Solitary vireo complex, and Blue-headed can be safely ruled out based on lack of vibrant yellows on sides of breast and flanks, lack of greenish coloration on back, and no yellowish-green on the edges of flight feathers or retrices. The more difficult separation falls on the intermediate species between Plumbeous and Blue-headed: Cassin's Vireo. Separating Cassin's and Plumbeous Vireos can be especially difficult on some individuals, where overlap in plumage and song is known to occur.

Overall, this bird lacks the greenish or yellowish colors or washes on the back, coverts, flight feathers, retrices, and flanks of a Cassin's Vireo—in all lighting situations (harsh bright light and shadows). Only faint yellowish wash appears on the lower rump and lower flanks where it is expected on Plumbeous Vireo, and especially on fresh body feathers like this one has. The overall smooth and not fuzzy/spiky appearance of the head and back, as well as most of the underpart feathers being uniform and fluffy without broken barbs indicate that this bird has completed most of its pre-basic body molt. Therefore, the colors in the flanks and back are true, and are not a result of wear or fading as you would see on a spring/summer bird, where dull worn Cassin's Vireos can look like Plumbeous Vireos.

The strong facial pattern of this bird with the stark white eyering, throat, and underparts contrasting with the gray upperparts are also indicative of Plumbeous Vireo, compared to the more muted appearance and less striking demarcation of head and throat that is seen on Cassin's Vireos.

Finally, the lower pitch of this bird's song was consistent throughout all phrases of its singing bouts, and lower than any Cassin's Vireo I have heard. Many authorities find identification in the field by song for these two species useless, and I recognize these limitations. However, analyzing long multi-phrase recordings can be useful, especially when coupling with plumage characteristics. Recordings were sent to Ed Pandolfino who calculated the average mid-point pitch of the song phrases to compare to known Cassin's and Plumbeous Vireo recordings. His

findings reveal that this bird fell below the lower 95% confidence limit of Cassin's Vireo frequencies, but in the upper range of Plumbeous Vireo frequencies. This is not definitive, but is highly suggestive of Plumbeous Vireo rather than Cassin's Vireo.

Given the overlap in plumage and audio of Cassin's and Plumbeous Vireos, combinations of these characteristics are required to confidently eliminate one species. In summary, this individual has all its plumage characteristics on fresh, unworn, basic feathers, and an unbiased analysis of the pitch of its song all indicating Plumbeous Vireo.

eBird reports and associated Macaulay Library media:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S38459629>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S38573078>

See archived photos:

ML65690761

ML65097541

ML65097551

ML65097561

ML65097571

See archived audio:

ML65691281

ML65691291

ML65140691

ML65140701











Location Page Springs Campground, Harney County, Oregon, US ([Map](#)) ([Hotspot](#))

Date and Effort Thu Aug 03, 2017 8:44 AM

Protocol: Traveling
 Party Size: 2
 Duration: 1 hour(s), 57 minute(s)
 Distance: 0.1 mile(s)
 Observers: [Cal Gesmundo](#)
 Comments: N/A
 Submitted from eBird for iOS, version 1.5.140

Species 24 species total

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- 3 Mallard
- 1 California Quail
- 1 Virginia Rail
- 2 Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)
- 1 Olive-sided Flycatcher
- 3 Willow Flycatcher
- 5 Eastern Kingbird

1 Plumbeous Vireo

*rare. First heard singing. Burrier and lower than Cassins. Whitish gray, not yellow secondary edging. Overall gray head and back, lacking any contrast between the two. Only very faint yellow on lower flanks. Singing incessantly from mid to upper canopy of cottonwoods in campsite 32. Photos and recording.



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