

EASTERN WHIP-POOR-WILL IN SAN DIEGO

Early in the morning of 14 November 1970 I discovered a male Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus* in one of the mist nets in my yard on Pt. Loma, San Diego, California. At this time the bird was examined in detail by Virginia P. Coughran, Pierre Devillers, G. Shumway Suffel, and myself; it was measured, described, and photographed (color slide deposited in the San Diego Natural History Museum). We felt the bird might be of the eastern race, *C. v. vociferus*. To confirm this, the bird was compared directly with material in the San Diego Natural History Museum (SDNHM) by Joseph R. Jehl, Jr. It was then banded and released.

The following description of this bird is from PD's notes which were made at the time of its capture:

Upperparts: Forehead and top of head gray with an irregularly branching, velvety black midline, and a few fine, well defined, black streaks. Back and rump gray, finely speckled with paler gray, and conspicuously marked with well defined, long, fine black streaks without edgings. The rump is perhaps of a slightly lighter gray than the back. A faint buff collar on the nape. The scapulars each form an oval patch of light silvery gray with fine, irregular black, cream, buff, and gray vermiculations and bordered by large, velvety black drop-shaped spots, edged with buff and cream. The wing coverts are browner than the back, but with similar pattern, the center of each feather black; some are edged with buff. The primaries and secondaries are barred with dull reddish buff and black, the tertials paler, appearing washed with whitish. Loes tawny. Cheek darker, vermiculated reddish tawny and black. Posterior auriculars dark reddish. Tail: Central pair of rectrices grayish, finely freckled with paler gray. Seven black bars shaped as broken "V" 's. Next pair darker, browner, with dots more buff, bars heavier, more complete, and closer together. Three outer pairs black with reddish bars (spotted with black) on the edges, not meeting in the center and rather faint, white tipped (white measures 45 mm, 43 mm, and 29 mm, respectively). On the outer rectrix the black continues almost to the tip on the outer edge. Underparts: Chin and throat black, the feathers finely edged with whitish-buff and reddish. Lower throat white, (crescent-shaped), scaled with buff. Breast gray, with fine black streaking. Lower breast, belly, undertail coverts whitish pink, barred or scaled with black, the flanks grayer, and more regularly barred with dark gray. Soft parts: Iris black. Bill very small, hooked and slaty black. Toes black. Measurements: wing, 151 mm; tail, 118 mm; tarsus, 15 mm; middle toe (less claw) 15 mm.

The wing chord measurement is well outside the range of the western race, *arizonae* (162-178.5 mm for males), and near the lower limit of that of *vociferus*, the smaller eastern race (149-168.5 mm, males) (Ridgway 1914). The upperparts are distinctly grayish, and JRJ found by direct comparison with SDNHM material that the bird could be easily matched by eastern specimens; he could "see nothing about this bird that would lead [him] to place it with western birds".

Further examination of specimens in the SDNHM, and (by PD) in the Los Angeles County Museum and the University of California at Los Angeles collections indicated that, on average, *vociferus* and *arizonae* differ in three principal plumage characters: The head, back, and rump are gray on *vociferus*, and brownish on *arizonae*. The streaks on the back and rump of *vociferus* are well defined, thin, elongated, and edged with buff, while on *arizonae* these marks are usually thicker,

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less elongated, and often indistinct or blurred; if distinct, they are usually edged with buff. The ground color of the central rectrices tends to pale silvery gray on the eastern birds versus pale sandy buff on the western birds. Although some individuals of either race can resemble those of the other race, many individuals are reasonably easy to separate.

An additional diagnostic character is the rectal bristles, which, as Ridgway states, are shorter and finer on *vociferus*, longer and stouter on *arizonae*. JRJ noted that the Point Loma bird had bristles resembling those of eastern birds in thickness and length, and, like those of the specimens in the local collection, they were blackish to the base. He pointed out that the bristles on the western specimens are brownish at the base, contrasting with the blacker tip. Examination of material in the L. A. County and U. C. L. A. collections showed this difference to hold in all specimens there. To my knowledge this character is not noted in the literature, but may well prove to be useful in separating these races.

In all these characters the Point Loma bird resembled extreme individuals of *vociferus*, and therefore I do not hesitate to refer it to this race.

The breeding ranges of the eastern and western Whip-poor-wills do not overlap. *C. v. vociferus* occupies most of the eastern United States, extending north to southern Canada and as far west as central Saskatchewan (Godfrey, 1966). In the U. S. the range extends west to the eastern edges of the prairie states and south to north-



Whip-poor-will *C. v. vociferus* from Point Loma, California, showing fine, black streaks on back.

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eastern Oklahoma and northeastern Texas (A.O.U. 1957). It winters from eastern Mexico to Costa Rica. The range of *C.v. arizonae* extends from the mountains of Arizona, southern New Mexico, and southwestern Texas south along the Sierra Madre Occidental. Related subspecies are found in southern Mexico and Central America and closely resemble *arizonae* in voice and coloration. To my knowledge the only other extralimital record of *vociferus* in the southwest is that of a specimen taken near Roosevelt, Arizona, 4 November 1952 (Phillips, Marshall, and Monson, 1964). Previous records of Whip-poor-will in California pertain to the western subspecies (Jones, 1971).

It is interesting to note that these two forms, both having occurred now in California, have been held as specifically distinct by Davis (1962) who demonstrated



Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus vociferus*, Point Loma, San Diego, California.
Photos by Pierre Devillers

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that the vocalizations of *vociferus* and *arizonae* are consistently different. The important differences are in the first syllable (the "WHIP" note) and in the first half of the second syllable ("POOR"). On sonograms the first syllable in the song of *vociferus* is inflected upward sharply at the beginning, then flattens out, and remains smooth (indicating a constant pitch) until the end where the sound is cut off abruptly without a change in pitch (it may include two segments); in *arizonae* this syllable is arched and composed of a series of short, peaked segments. The first half of the second syllable (the "POOR" note) of *vociferus* is characterized by about three to five low, flat humps on sonograms, representing a rising and lowering of pitch. In *arizonae* this syllable is composed of a series of sharp peaks and dips, produced by a rapidly changing pitch or vibrato sound. However, Lanyon (1968), in discussing Davis' findings, expresses the opinion that final disposition of the problem must await further studies. Careful playback experiments would undoubtedly contribute significantly to the solution of this problem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Joseph R. Jehl, Jr. for comparing the Point Loma bird to the SDNHM specimens and for his valuable comments. I am indebted to Pierre Devillers who examined specimens in the Los Angeles County and U. C. L. A. collections for me and who provided invaluable assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

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