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MORE ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF THE NEVADA TEST SITE

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Observations of birds on the Nevada Test Site, an area of restricted access in southern Nye County administered by the U.S. Department of Energy, have been recorded since the 1960s (Hayward et al. 1963). Early surveys of birds on the test site generally focused on the eastern and northern areas affected by nuclear testing and other human activities (Hayward et al. 1963, Richards 1962) or southern portions of the test site around Mercury (Castetter and Hill 1979) and Rock Valley (Rundel and Gibson 1996). We report observations made in the southwestern portion of the test site near Yucca Mountain, an area of interest because the Department of Energy is studying the mountain as a potential site for storing spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste.

From 1989 to 1998 we recorded observations on Yucca Mountain and on Jackass Flats to the east (Boone and Lederle 1998). The study area is located on the northern edge of the Mojave Desert along an ecotone between the Great Basin and Mojave deserts and includes floristic characteristics of both deserts (Beatley 1976). Vegetation at lower elevations is dominated by Creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*), and this plus other shrubs are common at higher elevations, but Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) is not common. In the study area, four small (0.03–0.08 ha) man-made ponds and one natural spring provide water continuously. Vegetation at the water sources includes Saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), Southern Cattail (*Typha domingensis*), Goodding's Willow (*Salix gooddingii*), cottonwood (*Populus* spp.), and herbaceous species. This desert area receives little precipitation and experiences large daily and seasonal temperature fluctuations.

From 1989 to 1998 we observed 120 species (Boone and Lederle 1998) and added 13 species to the list of birds previously known to occur on the test site (Castetter and Hill 1979, Hayward et al. 1963, Richards 1962, Rundel and Gibson 1996). Most observations were opportunistic, and the only systematic study of birds in the area focused on ravens and raptors (Lederle et al. 1997). The new species are the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*; Midway Valley; 5 November 1995), American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*; Jackass Flats, Well J-10; 8 October 1997), Sora (*Porzana carolina*; Jackass Flats, pond formerly located south of Well J-10; 5 May 1993), Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*; Midway Valley; 30 June 1992), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*; Midway Valley; 15 June 1996), Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*; Calico Hills; 25 March 1993), Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*; Cane Spring; 17 October 1996), Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*; Jackass Flats, Well J-11; 8 October 1997), Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*; Jackass Flats, Well J-11; 8 October 1997), Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*; Yucca Mountain; 8 October 1992), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*; Jackass Flats, Well J-11; 8 October 1997), Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*; Jackass Flats; 1992), and Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*; Jackass Flats, Well J-11; 15 July 1997). Most of these observations were made at the ponds during migration, and given the number of species that traverse the region (> 350 species at Death Valley National Park 60 km to the southwest), these observations were not surprising.

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In addition to the newly reported species, we recorded nesting of eight species not previously reported as breeding on the Nevada Test Site: Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*), Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), Barn Owl, Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*), Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*), Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*), European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

Great-tailed Grackles, not previously reported on the test site, were sighted frequently in the Yucca Mountain area beginning in 1992. The range of this species has been expanding to the west and north (Scheuering and Ivey 1995), and it probably first appeared on the Yucca Mountain area after 1982, because it was not noted during surveys that year.

We noted several eastern species on 8 October 1997 (Chestnut-sided Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak). On the basis of unpublished checklists, all three species are considered rare and have been observed on the nearby Desert National Wildlife Range (approximately 100 km southeast of Yucca Mountain) and in Death Valley National Park (approximately 60 km southwest), but none have been noted at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (approximately 50 km south). Alcorn (1988) considered the Chestnut-sided Warbler to be rare in Nevada, the Northern Waterthrush to be an accidental transient, and the Rose-breasted Grosbeak to be a spring and fall migrant.

The male Williamson's Sapsucker was observed on 17 October 1996 in a small riparian area containing large cottonwoods and Saltcedar at approximately 1400 m elevation. This montane species is considered a resident in some of the northern mountain ranges in Nevada (Alcorn 1988). In southern Nevada, Austin and Bradley (1971) considered it a "visitant in riparian areas," from April through November.

Reported observations of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) during the 1970s were doubted by Castetter and Hill (1979). However, this species was observed during 1992 at Yucca Flats on the eastern side of the test site (Hunter 1994).

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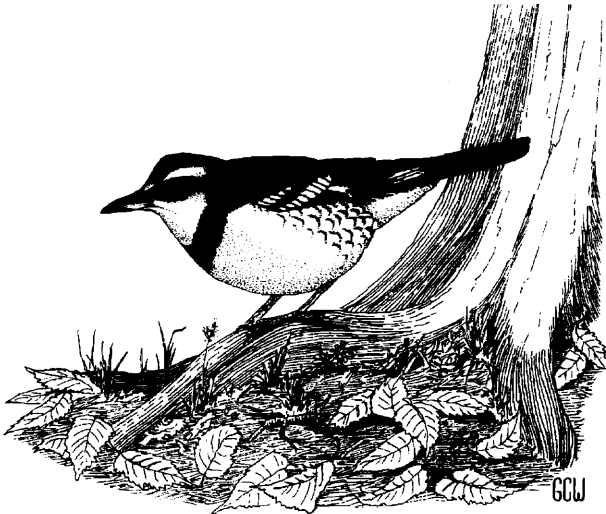
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Varied Thrush

Sketch by George C. West