

THE CERULEAN WARBLER IN NEW MEXICO

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An impressive array of New World warblers (Family Parulidae) occurs in New Mexico, where 49 species have been verified including all but one of the widespread warblers of eastern North America. Of those widespread eastern warblers, the Cerulean Warbler (*Setophaga cerulea*) is the rarest as regards to its occurrence in New Mexico, with but four acceptable records through 2019. This paper details those four records, discusses a questionable early report, corrects an erroneous published report, and summarizes the status of the species in the state.

The Cerulean Warbler breeds in eastern North America, almost entirely in the eastern U.S., where it nests primarily in mature deciduous forests; it migrates largely through the Mississippi Valley and across the Gulf of Mexico and winters in northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997, AOU 1998). Within recent decades, the species has declined precipitously throughout much of its breeding range, related to loss or alteration of mature hardwood forests, and it is similarly threatened within its relatively narrow wintering range on forested mountain slopes in northern South America (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Curson 2010, Buehler et al. 2020). The species is currently considered as a bird species of continental conservation concern (Rosenberg et al. 2016).

NEW MEXICO RECORDS

The Cerulean Warbler was first adequately reported in New Mexico in 1989, but there have been only three additional records since then; this scarcity in New Mexico is consistent with scarcity of the species elsewhere in western North America (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Buehler et al. 2020). One described as a spring-plumaged female was seen at Rattlesnake Springs, Eddy County on 19 April 1989 by Steve West (*Am. Birds* 43:522, 1989). One described as a female or immature male was seen at Percha Dam State Park, Sierra County, on 5 October 1991 by John E. Parmeter and again on 7 [not 14 as published] October by Larry P. Gorbet (*Am. Birds* 46:135, 1991). A singing male was described near Piedra Lisa Spring, Sandia Mountains, Sandoval County, on 22 May 1994 by Mike Ramos (unpublished). A singing male was photographed in the San Mateo Mountains at Springtime Campground, Socorro County, on 26 May 2001 by Christopher M. Rustay (*North Am. Birds* 55:338, 2001), providing the only confirmed (*i.e.*, with photograph or specimen) New Mexico record (Figure 1). The New Mexico Bird Records Committee has reviewed and accepted each of these four records; full documentation for each is on file with the committee.



Figure 1. Male Cerulean Warbler at Springtime Campground, San Mateo Mountains, Socorro County, New Mexico, 26 May 2001. Image capture from video taken by Christopher M. Rustay.

QUESTIONABLE AND ERRONEOUS REPORTS

A report of a Cerulean Warbler seen along the Mimbres River, Grant County, in late April 1853 by T. C. Henry (Henry 1855) was included in the state's avifauna by Bailey (1928) but was questioned by Hubbard (1970, 1978). As there are no details with which to evaluate that report, it is considered questionable and is not included here. A Cerulean Warbler was reported as definitively photographed at Ruidoso, Lincoln County, on or about 4 July 1978 (*NMOS Bulletin* 10:56, 1982). Reexamination of the single color slide of that bird (NM-1978-20-A) proves it to be a Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*), likely *J. h. dorsalis* (the breeding subspecies there), the misidentification probably caused by a shadow across the bird's breast resembling the breast band of a Cerulean Warbler.

NEW MEXICO STATUS SUMMARY

Distribution. The Cerulean Warbler is a casual vagrant to New Mexico, with four acceptable records through 2019, these from four counties from the vicinity of the Rio Grande Valley eastward: Sandoval County (Sandia Mountains), Socorro County (San Mateo Mountains), Sierra County (Rio Grande Valley) and Eddy County (Black River Valley) (Figure 2).

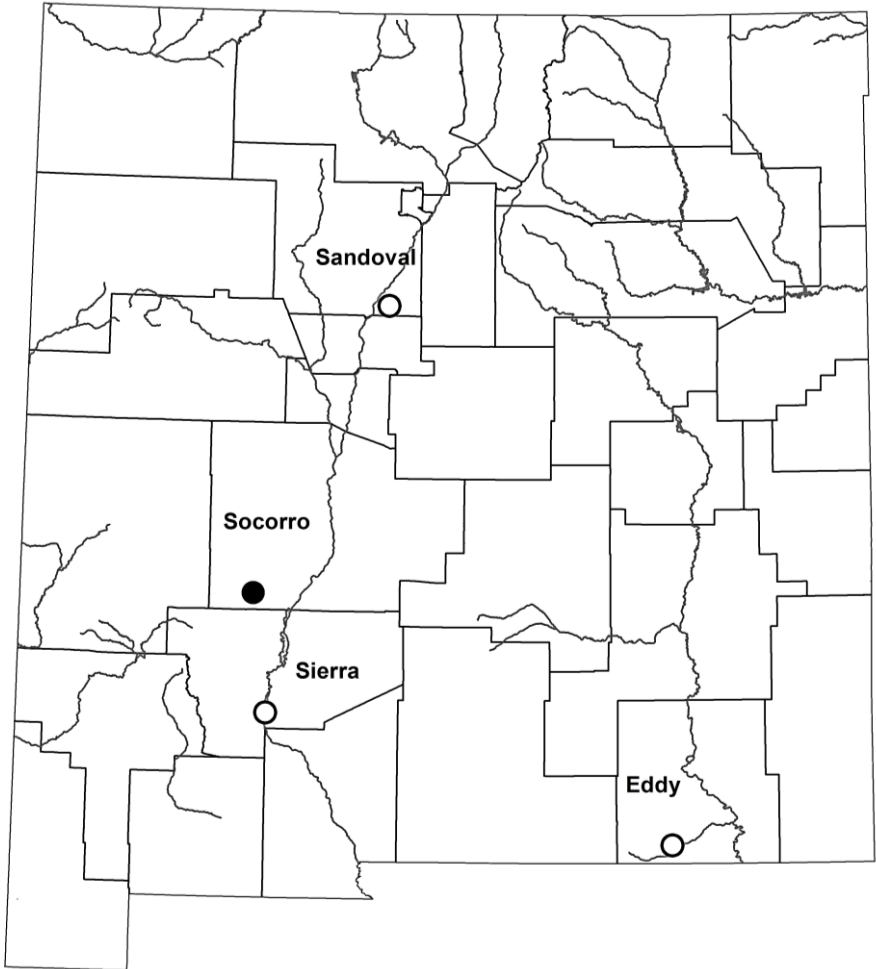


Figure 2. Map of New Mexico showing counties and locations of four Cerulean Warbler records through 2019. Solid circle indicates photographic record; open circles indicate detailed sight records.

Seasonality. There are three spring records, 19 April-26 May, and one fall record, 5-7 October. The 19 April date, from southeastern New Mexico, is early as regards the western U.S., and the preponderance of spring versus fall records is the opposite of that recorded for western North America generally (Dunn and Garrett 1997, Buehler et al. 2020); this is likely the result of New Mexico's eastern location. Adjacent western states show the same bias for spring records, Arizona with two spring records 18 and 28 May and none in fall (Monson and Phillips 1981) and Colorado with three spring records 4-25 May and two in fall 4 and 9 September (eBird.org, accessed 19 May 2020).

Habitat. All New Mexico records are of single birds, each showing preference for tall trees in wooded or forested areas. In riparian situations, they were found feeding in tops of cottonwoods (*Populus* sp.) at Rattlesnake Springs (elev. 1105 m) and Percha Dam State Park (1265 m). In mountains, they were associated with Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) in mixed oak-conifer habitats near Piedra Lisa Spring (1890 m) in the northern Sandia Mountains, where a male was singing and gleaning insects from the crown of an oak, and at Springtime Campground (2135 m) in the San Mateo Mountains, where a male was singing and gleaning small caterpillars from oaks.

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