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1983 ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD IN SILVER CITY

Notice of the Meeting

The 1983 Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Ornithological Society is scheduled for 16–17 April 1983, at Western New Mexico University in Silver City. Chairman of the Local Arrangements Committee is Dr. Bruce J. Hayward of WNMU. As is customary, paper sessions and other presentations will occupy the program on Saturday. Sunday will be reserved for field trips. Make plans now to attend, to catch up on the activities of fellow New Mexico birders, learn about recent research in the state, and of course sample the rich birdlife of southwestern New Mexico. Migration should be in full swing, a range of habitats from spruce-fir forest to the Sonoran conditions of the Gila Valley is nearby, and (for those who can stay around) the Chiricahuas are less than two hours away.

Call for Papers

Kevin Zimmer, Chairman of the Program Committee for the 1983 Annual Meeting, advises that requests for time on the program should reach him by 1 February 1983. Presentations on any topic of ornithological interest are invited. Customary length is 15–20 minutes. Send an informal abstract, with estimate of time needed, to Kevin Zimmer, Biology Department, NMSU Box 3AF, Las Cruces, NM 88003.

AN ORNITHOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF ALEGROS PEAK

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INTRODUCTION

New Mexico is a large state with a rich avifauna and a short but rich ornithological history. In the mid-nineteenth century the territory was criss-crossed by military exploring parties, most of which included one of the now-legendary surgeon-naturalists. Around the turn of the century, and afterwards, collectors for the Bureau of Biological Survey scoured the hinterlands. In the past two decades members of the New Mexico Ornithological Society have collected, archived, and analyzed a tremendous quantity of information on bird distribution within the state. Yet still many parts of the state remain almost or completely unexplored ornithologically. Visits to such places can be surprisingly rewarding, as recent expeditions to the isolated peak Sierra Grande illustrated (Hubbard 1977). It was with this legacy in mind that we decided to make a short ornithological reconnaissance of Alegros Peak, in northern Catron County.

Alegros Peak was of interest to us not only because it had not been explored (so far as we know it had never before been visited by an ornithologist), but also because it is high, isolated, and located in a biogeographical transition zone. At 10,229 ft (3120 m), Alegros is the highest of the few 10,000 ft peaks between Mt. Taylor and the highest peaks of the Mogollon massif. Its steep, north-facing slopes might be expected to harbor subalpine spruce—fir forest and the characteristic species of that plant association.

On the other hand, Alegros is not part of a range, but is an isolated volcanic remnant surrounded by rolling hills at the 8000 ft (2440 m) level. Its area above 9000 ft (2745 m), where a subalpine environment might exist, is less than two square miles (or less than 500 ha). Thus one might reasonably ask, if a subalpine ecosystem does occur on Alegros what portion of the typical subalpine avifauna occurs on this small island of habitat.

Finally, western New Mexico is an area of biogeographic transition, where many montane species reach southern or northern limits of their breeding ranges. Several species thus might reach a limit on Alegros. Which might they be, we wondered, and how would their presence change, if at all, accepted views of New Mexican avian biogeography.

SITE AND METHODS

To find some preliminary answers to these questions we visited Alegros on 11-13 May 1981. The mountain bears no drivable roads above the 8000 ft (2440 m) level, despite past logging operations. We camped at that level and hiked up the north slope each of the three days, at least one of us reaching the summit level on each day. We made no attempt to estimate quantitatively the abundance of species we found, nor to find a complete complement of the widespread species which might be expected anywhere in the state. Our emphases were determining the range of habitat available and locating species which might be at the peripheries of their ranges.

Vegetation changed rather abruptly at the base camp (see Fig. 1 for locations) from pinyon-juniper (*Pinus edulis*, *Juniperus monosperma*, *J. deppeana*) woodland to a curious mixture of pinyon, junipers, ponderosa pine (*P. ponderosa*), Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*, no other oak being seen), Douglasfir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), and white fir (*Abies concolor*). This assemblage could be found at any level, although open groves of ponderosa pines occurred on some sites and dense stands of the two firs (hereafter referred to as “fir forest”) with aspens (*Populus tremuloides*) occupy some of the upper slopes. On a windswept, grassy saddle at approximately 9500 ft (2900 m) we found a krummholz of junipers (*J. scopulorum*, *J. peana*, and *J. monosperma* (?)). The south-facing slopes at highest elevations are covered

with loose scree and boulders and scattered ponderosa pines, Douglasfirs, limber pines (*P. flexilis* or *P. strobiformis*, Alegros is in a zone of intergradation for the two taxa), and ocean spray (*Holodiscus dumosus*) . Despite the absence of spruces.(*Picea*) and subalpine fir (*Abies concolor*), the vegetation has a distinctly northern character. With few exceptions, notably white fir, all of the plant species occur in the Zuni Mountains (McCalluin pers. obs.). No living stream flows on this mountain, and only two trickling springs were found in this dry year.

All species detected are treated in the following list.

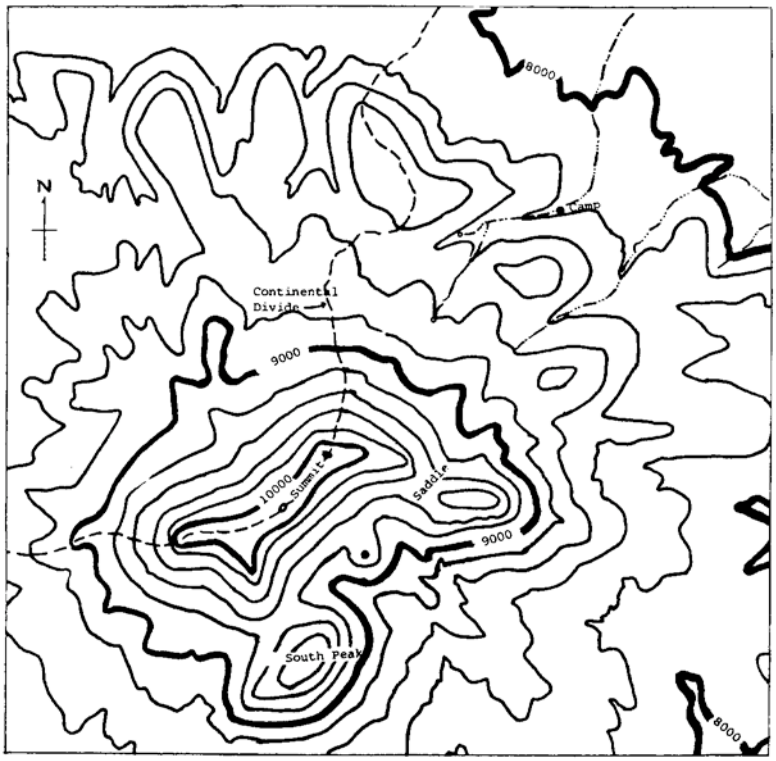

Fig. 1. Map of Alegros Peak, showing landmarks designated in text. Contour interval 200 ft. Adapted from USGS "Alegres Mtn." preliminary 7½' quadrangle.

ANNOTATED LIST

--GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*). One adult over camp, 5/13.
--SHARP—SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*). Two over fir thicket in canyon below saddle; one in fir forest north of summit (JCE).
--COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*). Two adults with nest at at 8600 ft, (2620 m), in open mixed conifer forest (RWS, KES, LA).
--GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*). One adult chased by nutcrackers over gulf between saddle and south peak, 5/11,5/13.
--MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*). Uncommon in oak woodland.
--SCREECH OWL (*Otus asio*). One heard at camp, 5/12 (LKE).
--FLAMMULATED OWL (*Otus flammeolus*). Male feeding female in pine-oak woodland, 5/12 (DAM, JCE, WRT).
--GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*). One heard at camp, 5/12.
--WHIP-POOR-WILL (*Capriinilgus vociferus*). One heard in a fir-choked ravine, at about 9000 ft (2745 m), 5/12(DAN, JCE, WRT).
--POOR WILL (*Phalmenoptilus nuttallii*). Heard at camp, 5/11, 5/12.

--WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatilis*). Common around summit.
--BROAD—TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*). Males heard from camp to summit.
--COMMON FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*). Common throughout.
--SAPSUCKER sp. (*Sphyrapicus* sp.). One bird poorly seen (RWS, KES).
--HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*). Common from camp to saddle.
--ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus crinitus*). Detected only around camp, 5/12.
--DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*). Birds seemingly of this species (voucher tapes of songs to NMOS Bird Records Committee) were watched and listened to from about 8600 ft (2620 m) to 10,000 ft (3050 m). Habitat was pine—oak, mixed—conifer—oak, or Douglasfir-limber pine-*Holodiscus*). Although these birds may have been transients, they gave the impression with their persistent singing from exposed perches of being on territory.
--WESTERN FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax difficilis*). One on south slope near summit, near a Dusky Flycatcher, 5/12 (JCE).
--WESTERN WOOD PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*). Detected only at camp.
--OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Nuttallornis borealis*). One, silent at the top of a snag, about 9200 ft (2810 m), 5/12.
--VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*). Common near summit, uncommon elsewhere.
--BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*). One or two seen each day.
--STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*). Common from camp to summit. Nest with 4 eggs, 8500 ft (2590 m), 5/13 (JCE, LKE); nest with 3 eggs, 9500 ft (2900 m), 5/11.
-—SCRUB JAY (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*). Detected only around camp.
-—COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*). Uncommon at all elevations.
--PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*). Flocks uncommon in pinyon-juniper woodland.
--CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*). Found from camp to saddle.
--MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Parus gambeli*). Common from camp to summit.
-—WHITE—BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*). Heard commonly in ponderosa pine associations, not fir forests.
-—RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*). Fairly common in fir forest above 9000 ft (2745 m).
--PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*). Heard from camp to saddle, including in fir forests.
--BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*). Uncommon in fir forests.
—-HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*). One on 5/11 and 5/12.
--WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*). Found from camp to summit. Nest at camp.
—-TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*). Three records, one a pair, from 9000 ft (2745 m) to 10,200 ft (3110 m).
--RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*). Two records.
--SOLITARY VIRED (*Vireo solitarius*). Heard near camp, not higher.
--ORANGE-CROWNED WARDLER (*Vermivora celata*). Singing bird fairly common from 9200 ft (2810 m) to 10,000 ft (3050 m) in oak and fir.
--VIRGINIA'S WARBLER (*Vermivora virginiae*). Singing birds common in oaks and *Holodiscus* from 8000 ft (2440 m) to 9800 ft (2990 m).
--YELLOW-BUMPED WARBLER (*Dendroica coronata*). Abundant in flocks at all elevations. Many singing birds also detected.
--TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Dendroica townsendi*). One female, 5/12.
--RED—FACED WARBLER (*Cardellina rubrifrons*). Uncommon but wide-spread in areas with firs and and open space.
--WILSON'S WARBLER (*Wilsonia pusilla*). One male in fir forest.
--SCOTT'S ORIOLE (*Icterus parisoruin*). One female at a stock tank, 5/12 (JCE).
--BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*). One male near summit.

--WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*). Common in open penderosa pine forest.
--BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*). Abundant in pine-oak associations, mostly near ravines. Males vociferous.
--RUFOUS-SIDED TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*). Common in shrub associations (including oaks) from camp to summit.
--GRAY-HEADED JUNCO (*Junco caniceps dorsalis*). Common in a variety of plant associations from camp to summit. All birds seen had light heads, black around eyes, and dark upper mandibles. Some songs were recorded. Nest with 4 eggs, 9000 ft (2745 m), 5/12, 5/13 (WRT, DAM).

DISCUSSION

The results are noteworthy for the presence of some species and the absence of others. Among those present, the Red-faced Warbler and dorsalis race of the Gray—headed Junco seem to be near the northern limits of their ranges in New Mexico, although both occur farther north in central Arizona. Gray-headed Juncos of the Zuni Mountains, to the north, are intermediate between dorsalis and caniceps (Miller 1941) and Red—faced Warblers apparently do not occur there (MaCallum MS). The Whip—poor-will would have been thought to fall into this group, but the species was found in the Zuni Mountains in 1981 (McCallum MS) and 1982 (J. Trochet pers. comm.) and the Sandia Mountains in 1981 (R. Bradley pers. comm.).

The presence of the Dusky Flycatchers is both more surprising and, because they may have been migrants, more problematic. However, more northerly birds were already on territory on this date, and it seems unlikely to find seven singing migrants of a species which normally does not sing much on migration. In the absence of verification of summering this may be provisionally considered an extension of the known breeding range.
The complete absence of a subalpine zone in the area we covered, and probably on the entire mountain, obviates any discussion of subalpine birds. Apparently the small size of the mountain cancels some of the effect of height in producing boreal conditions. The core species of mixed coniferous forest (e.g. Western Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Ruby—crowned Kinglet, Orange—crowned Warbler, Red— faced Warbler) were present.

Several widespread species were not found. Most interesting of these are Band—tailed Pigeon, House Wren, American Robin, and Grace's Warbler, for they would be expected to occur in the vegetation associations which we covered most thoroughly.

The general picture which emerges is that of a rather depauperate montane avifauna. If further study should prove this to be the case, it may well be that the scarcity of water is a major factor contributing to the poverty of species (and individuals). We hope our small beginning will stimulate investigation of this and other questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LITERATURE CITED

HUBBARD, J.P. 1977. A biological inventory of Sierra Grande, Union County, New Mexico. Unpubl. MS, New Mexico Dept. of Game and Fish.
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