

Bullock's Oriole
20 Dec 1981
Cedar Falls, Black Hawk Co., IA
*Robert K. Myers
P-0038, IBL 52:28, 66:97

Record Number: 95-AB
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Robert K. Myers [9/23/97]

PHOTOGRAPHS

Robert K. Myers, P-0038

REFERENCES

Field Report: IBL 52:28, 1982

Records Committee: IBL 66:97; 68:?

Discussion of female orioles on internet from Paul Lehman (19 Dec 1996), David Sibley (27 Dec 1996), James D. Rising (29 Dec 1996), and Jonathan Dunn (3 Jan 1997).

VOTE: 6 A-P, 1 NA

A-P, The gray back and belly seem to be the way to identify the female Bullock's. Perhaps we should show these photos to an "expert".

A-P, Gray and not brownish back together with light gray to whitish belly and no orangish color make this a Bullock's.

NA (to species), While this bird is pale underneath, suggestive of first-fall female Bullock's, one of the photos shows facial markings, eyeline, and concave line below eye ('cupping' eye) suggestive of imm. female Baltimore (NGS). Howell and Webb (Mexico) state that they are not safely separated, although Baltimore tends to be more yellowish below. Overall, I would opt for first fall female (pale) Baltimore, but I question that the photos and description are sufficient to ID.

RE-VOTE: 5 A-P, 2 NA

A-P, Without the photos in front of me. I can't be sure how noticeable these facial markings are. I must confess I didn't notice them the first time. Photo referred to by observer also shows faint cupping effect. Description fits Bullock's more than Baltimore.

A-P, The photo, as I recall, seemed convincing, and the documentation is excellent. Perhaps the committee should re-review the photo and documentation at the upcoming meeting.

A-P, The light gray lower breast and belly, and eyeline are why I voted A-P on the photo.

NA, NA voter makes good points and is probably correct that the description and photos are not sufficient to make a positive ID. We may be in a position, especially with intergrade likelihood, that positive ID for Bullock's Oriole is not possible except for a male bird.

A-P, NA voter left out "often not" safely separated when quoting Howell and Webb. I can't see the eyeline and cupping or, at least, can't determine that it isn't artifact of lighting.

NA, No change from my initial comments. I would like to read expert comments also.

RE-VOTE (at meeting of 20 Sep 1997 with internet communications on identification and photos): 7 NA

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RE-VOTE (at meeting of 20 Sep 1997 with internet communications on identification and photos): 7 NA

[75] From: Paul Lehman <birding@ABA.ORG> at internet 12/19/96 4:29PM (2304 bytes : 43 ln)

To: JFULLER at dentistry-po, BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU at internet

Subject: Bullock's vs. Baltimore in East

----- Message Contents -----

X-Sender: birding@mail.usa.net

X-Mailer: Windows Eudora Version 1.4.4

Mime-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Reply-To: Paul Lehman <birding@ABA.ORG>

Sender: "National Birding Hotline Cooperative (Chat Line)"

<BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>

The oriole described by Al G. was also described to me by fellow PA birder Nick Pulcinella, who added that the yellow of the face had some orange tints. Sounds like a dull Baltimore. A fair number of dull female Baltimores have EXTENSIVE pale (whitish) bellies and pale yellow (not orange) bases to the tail. Most have a tinge of orange to the yellow on the face and/or throat. (Female Bullock's just yellow here.) The back color and pattern as described sounds good for Baltimore; some Baltimores are even duller (grayer) and plainer, as in Bullock's. Such dull Baltimores are somewhat regular in late fall.

Probably one of the most underappreciated field ID problems in the East is this one between dull female Baltimore vs. female Bullock's. If a bird has lots of white in the belly region and is lacking orange tones to much of its body, it does NOT mean it is necessarily a Bullock's.

(Immature males quite different and are much easier to tell apart.)

Perhaps one of the better distinctions is that Bullock's females show a distinct dark line through the eye (including the lores); such a line is either very weak or absent in Baltimore, giving it more of a plain-faced look.

A seemingly high percentage of Bullock's reports in the East seem to be of females. Suspicious? I think so. Seems to me a fair number of these are dull Baltimores, and records of female Bullock's in the East should be very carefully assessed and REassessed. Of course, hybrids may well occur as well, and how one might tell a hybrid from a dull Baltimore is a very good question indeed!!

Paul Lehman
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birding@aba.org
Cape May, New Jersey
birding@aba.org
609-884-6107

[73] From: David Sibley <dsibley@PULSAR.NET> at internet 12/27/96 8:28PM (2001 bytes: 33 ln)

To: JFULLER at dentistry-po, BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU at internet

Subject: Re: [BIRDWG01] female orioles

----- Message Contents -----

X-Sender: dsibley@pulsar.net

X-Mailer: Windows Eudora Light Version 1.5.4 (16)

Mime-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Reply-To: NBHC ID-FRONTIERS Frontiers of Field Identification
<BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>

Sender: NBHC ID-FRONTIERS Frontiers of Field Identification
<BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>

With no dissenting comments I assume that the identification of Noel Wamer's "pale female oriole" is accepted as a Baltimore? Of course with the caveat that hybrids and backcrosses are relatively frequent and that it may be impossible to identify such birds with certainty. The fact that similar pale orioles turn up regularly at Cape May suggests that paleness alone is not an indication of hybridization.

So assuming that we have established the range of variation in Baltimores, can someone from the west describe variation in Bullock's? Do female Bullock's ever approach the drab-faced appearance of Noel's bird, or do they always have a distinct dark eyeline and pale yellow cheeks and supercilium? I assume that Bullock's can get even paler than Noel's bird, but do they still retain a yellowish face? If there is some uncommon drab variant of Bullock's (as there seems to be in Baltimore) that could make identification REALLY challenging... and the problem of hybrids is always lurking.

A couple of people mentioned differences in call between Baltimore and Bullock's. Are the differences reliable? Is it something that is useful for identifying vagrant Baltimores in the west and should we easterners be paying attention to calls of possible Bullock's??

David Sibley
Cape May Point, NJ

[75] From: "James D. Rising" <rising@ZOO.TORONTO.EDU> at internet 12/29/96 11:28 AM (1923 bytes: 29 ln)
To: JFULLER at dentistry-po, BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU at internet
Subject: Bullock's vs. Baltimore

----- Message Contents -----

MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII
Reply-To: "James D. Rising" <rising@ZOO.TORONTO.EDU>
Sender: "National Birding Hotline Cooperative (Chat Line)"
<BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>
In-Reply-To: <199612202228.PAA38998@dns.ccit.arizona.edu>

In my experience, female Bullock's Orioles (*Icterus bullockii*) and female Baltimore Orioles (*I. galbula*) can always be told apart in the summer. The former are paler, with a grayish yellow-green back, whitish or very pale yellow belly, and black confined to the throat and perhaps the eyeline. Baltimore females are extremely variable (some look like full adult males), but yellower, often with extensive black on head and back. The molting sequences of the two species is different. Hatch year (HY) Baltimore orioles undergo the first prebasic molt on the breeding grounds before migrating; Bullock's molt in Oct. while migrating. In Bullock's there is no prealternate molt, whereas in Baltimore there is an extensive PA molt in March before spring migration (Rohwer & Manning, Condor 92:125-140, 1990). I agree with those who urge caution in identifying "females" (note: you can't always sex them) in winter. The field guide pictures are generally not satisfactory (Nat. Geog. Guide best that I've seen). "Females" in most field guides are birds in juvenal plumage of either sex.

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rising@zoo.utoronto.ca or rising@zoo.toronto.edu
Phone (416) 978-3482 FAX (416) 978-8532

[77] From: Jonathan Dunn <jld.cerwa@WORLDNET.ATT.NET> at internet 1/3/97 8:25PM
(3538 bytes: 53 ln)

To: JFULLER at dentistry-po, BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU at internet

Subject: [BIRDWG01] Northern Orioles (sexing of immatures, calls)

----- Message Contents -----

X-Sender: jld.cerwa@postoffice.worldnet.att.net

X-Mailer: Windows Eudora Light Version 1.5.2

Mime-Version: 1.0

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Reply-To: NBHC ID-FRONTIERS Frontiers of Field Identification
<BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>

Sender: NBHC ID-FRONTIERS Frontiers of Field Identification
<BIRDWG01@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU>

I arrived somewhat late on the back and forth discussion of separating field marks of dull **Baltimore vs. Bullock's Orioles**. It is a problem that we have discussed for over 20 years. I used to think that it was just the immature female Baltimores that were dull. Then in early September of 1996 on Santa Cruz Island I saw a problematical bird with Michael O'Brien. We studied it for a good long while and were undecided about the identity. The ID was resolved when it burst into a brief song which was clearly a Baltimore. Yet, I do see bright orange fall birds in late September and October that I confidently identify as immature males.

Most Baltimores that I see in the fall and winter do contain some orange in the plumage, especially on the throat and upper breast. Most of the fall Bullock's I see after mid August (probably mostly immatures) away from known wintering areas, look typically very pale with pale lemon yellow across the throat and chest. There is no tinge of orange. As others have commented on there always seems to be some indication of a trans ocular line that extends through the lores to the base of the bill. I don't see such an eye line on Baltimores. I did see one very drab oriole (I have photos somewhere) at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley N.M., eastern California that lacked any orange tones. There was some drab yellow and dusky. It was with a typical looking immature male Baltimore and on the basis of probability a Baltimore would be more likely. I suspect that it was the dull extreme for Baltimore. I have not looked at Noel Wamer's photos on the orioles at his feeder.

One other issue is the calls of the two species. Bullock's has a really typical chatter of "cha" notes, given singularly or often in a series. The note of Baltimore sounds different to me and their chatter doesn't seem as patterned. I find it hard to describe the qualitative difference, but Streak-backed Oriole sounds more like Baltimore to me. When I hear the well organized series of "cha" notes of typical Bullock's, I have never found a Baltimore when I have chased down the call. This experience is mainly from coastal California where both species winter. Perhaps the whistle calls differ slightly too. It certainly is a frequent note from Baltimore.

I would be careful about considering hybrids for intermediate looking birds. I have not birded the hybrid zone, but in all of my birding, including nearly annual spring trips all across Texas, I have only once seen an obvious adult male hybrid. That bird was in the winter at Balboa Park, San Diego. I recall that Paul Lehman and Louis Bevier saw that bird too. I have seen more hybrid Black-headed X Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Indigo X Lazuli Buntings.

Jon L. Dunn



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>023 19-01 R2NNNN+01RU 209

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>010 19-01 R2NNNN+01RU 209

Bullock's Oriole P-0038
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95-AB

>002 19+00 R2NNNN+04RU 209

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Northern Oriole (Bullock's) ♀ How many? 1 C Falls
95-ABLocation? Cedar Falls, Iowa - Black Hawk CountyType of habitat? coming to feeder in residential areaWhen? date(s): 12-20-81 time: 3:00 AM to 3:15 P.M.Who? your name and address: Robert K. Myersothers with you: Mr. + Mrs. Don Irwin have had the bird coming for 3 weeks

others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Size - Bigger than house sparrow but smaller than robin (about starling size) -

Bird had fairly long tail which had slight fork in end.

Bill - Beak was dagger like (very pointed) and fairly long + thin - The upper mandible appeared darker than the lower. (dark gray vs. light gray)

Eye - dark in color - yellow orange on side of head goes just above eye

Coloration - Upper breast (bib-like) and sides of head were yellow-orange somewhat darker than yellow on side of head
Lower breast and belly were light gray

Under tail coverts and underside of tail showed the same yellow-orange as breast

Top of head, neck, and back were olive-gray

Wings were darker olive-gray and had 2 wing bars (white) - The primaries also seemed to be edged in white.

Behavior - Bird has been coming to feeder for 3 weeks and still is - last sighting was on Dec. 25, 1981. - The oriole is feeding on a thistle feeder - picking seeds from the little holes and feeding in the catching tray.

Similar species and how eliminated: The "Baltimore" subspecies has the yellow-orange on breast going down the breast thru belly and has a more yellowish back.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Good light - dis. about 15' - B&L 7X35 binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I am familiar with the Northern oriole but have never seen the western subspecies before

References and persons consulted before writing description: I checked Peterson's + Robbin's guides but best photo is in Audubon Soc Field Guide to N.A. Birds - Western by Udvardy

How long before field notes made? 30 min. this form completed? 1 week

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240