

THE MEXICAN SUBSPECIES OF TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE IN THE ANIMAS
MOUNTAINS: A FIRST FOR NEW MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES

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Phillips (1991) recognizes 2 subspecies in Townsend's solitaire, *Myadestes townsendi* (Audubon), with the nominate form (type locality near Astoria, Oregon) nesting from Alaska, Yukon, and Mackenzie southward to California, Arizona, and New Mexico. The other subspecies, *M. t. calophonus* Moore (type locality Mt. Mohinora, Chihuahua), is a presumed resident of the Sierra Madre Occidental and nearby highlands from Sonora and Chihuahua south

to Zacatecas. According to Phillips (1991), the only specimen from Jalisco is notably different from these 2 taxa and may be a variant or undescribed form. The sole United States record of *M. t. calophonus* is a specimen that Phillips provisionally assigned to this taxon from Dutchess Co., New York (American Museum of Natural History 707718). However, RWD recently has examined this specimen and concluded it is a soiled (probably soot-stained) ex-

ample of *M. t. townsendi*. On the other hand, we have long suspected a nesting-season specimen from extreme southwestern New Mexico might represent *M. t. calophonus*, this an adult female (gonadal condition not indicated on label) taken on 30 June 1939 by A. C. Twomey at Turkey Spring, Animas Mountains, Hidalgo Co. (Carnegie Museum of Natural History 124112). Following appropriate comparisons, we now can confirm that specimen is indeed referable to *M. t. calophonus*, and as such represents the first unequivocal record of this subspecies for New Mexico and the United States.

Ridgway (1907) first noted that nesting Townsend's solitaires in Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas differ from more northern ones in having the plumage slightly darker and browner in coloration, with deeper buff bases to the remiges. However, his Mexican series was small, and he opted against naming that population as a new subspecies. Later and on the basis of more material, Moore (1937) confirmed Ridgway's earlier findings and named the Sierra Madre Occidental population *M. t. calophonus*. He further distinguished this taxon by its darker pileum (in contrast to the color of the back), versus these areas being paler and concolorous in *M. t. townsendi*. In addition, *M. t. calophonus* was described as uniformly dark gray below (with the throat and breast tinged olive), whereas the chin, throat, and abdomen are paler than the remaining underparts in the nominate form. The Animas Mountains specimen agrees closely in all of these features with *M. t. calophonus*, and thus we have no hesitation in assigning it to that form.

In describing *M. t. calophonus*, Moore (1937) extended its range northward in the Sierra Madre Occidental to northern Chihuahua—based on 2 specimens listed without specific localities. However, Miller et al. (1957) had a different view, delineating the northern limits of this form as southern Chihuahua and probably southeastern Sonora. North of there, they assigned the nesting solitaires of northern Chihuahua (Río Gavilán) to the nominate form—based on material housed at the University of California's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ). In 1958, Phillips examined those same specimens (MVZ 119680–119683, 2 to 20 August 1948) and referred them to *M. t. calophonus* (C. Cicero, pers. comm.)—along with 2 others from the Sierra del Nido (MVZ 135664–

135665, 22 June 1957). Thus, Phillips concurred with Moore as regards the northern limits of this subspecies, as also reiterated in his recent review of geographic variation in Townsend's solitaire (Phillips, 1991). Given the last is the most current treatment, we provisionally accept the view that all nesting populations in Chihuahua and presumably adjacent Sonora are assignable to *M. t. calophonus*. However, this matter obviously merits further study, preferably based on more recently collected material from earlier in the nesting season.

Moore (1937) indicated that nesting Townsend's solitaires in New Mexico and Colorado are intermediate in plumage coloration between *M. t. calophonus* and *M. t. townsendi*, whereas those from Arizona are closer to the nominate form. Based on our examination, we agree Arizona specimens indeed represent *M. t. townsendi*—albeit little nesting-season material is available from there (or New Mexico). We disagree that nesting solitaires from New Mexico and Colorado are intermediate, and instead assign them to the nominate form. In fact, the only evidence of intergradation reported between these taxa is in the Mogollon Mountains, Catron Co., southwestern New Mexico (Hubbard, 1965). In that case, 4 specimens (University of Michigan Museum of Zoology 208049–208052, 16 June to 13 July 1964) were found to be somewhat darker than birds from farther north; however, this series is clearly much closer to *M. t. townsendi*, and thus not to be confused with *M. t. calophonus* (including the specimen from the Animas Mountains). Finally, Moore (1937) mentioned a dark solitaire (Museum of Comparative Zoology 89786, 21 March 1902) from New Castle, Garfield Co., Colorado, which might be a melanistic example of *M. t. townsendi*. We have examined this specimen and concur with its assignment to the nominate race; however, its darker plumage is due to soiling, not melanism.

The Animas Mountains are one of the so-called border ranges, which arise from grassland and desert habitats along the United States–Mexican boundary—including New Mexico, Arizona, Chihuahua, and Sonora. Townsend's solitaire is absent as a nesting bird in these ranges, although the nominate race occurs regularly in that region at other seasons (e.g., Hubbard, 1978; Monson and Phillips, 1981; Russell and Monson, 1998). This absence

creates a gap of some 350 km between solitaire populations nesting on the Mogollon Plateau of Arizona and New Mexico and the Sierra Madre Occidental of northwestern Mexico. No similar hiatus exists among other landbirds in the region, as those nesting in these 2 larger massifs also do so in at least some of the border ranges. The absence of nesting Townsend's solitaires in the borderlands is puzzling, as seemingly suitable nesting habitat occurs in places like Arizona's Chiricahua and Santa Catalina mountains. Indeed, this solitaire summers and doubtlessly nests in an even smaller range nearby, namely the Pinos Altos Mountains along the southern edge of the Mogollon Plateau in Grant Co., New Mexico (J. P. Hubbard, pers. obser.). However, that population is small, and, in some years, has been absent since first observed there in 1967. Whatever the case, we suspect Townsend's solitaires may at times nest in the border ranges, although doubtlessly in very small numbers and quite locally. If so, the occurrence of *M. t. calophonus* in the Animas Mountains demonstrates that birds could originate from the south as well as the north (the nearest nesting populations of the 2 subspecies are about equidistant from that range, i.e., ca. 175 km away).

Resumen—Por lo general, se aceptan dos subespecies de la guardabarranca de Townsend. Una es *Myadestes townsendi townsendi* (Audubon) que anida en Canadá y los Estados Unidos de América, y la otra más oscura es *M. t. calophonus* Moore de la Sierra Madre Occidental y alrededores en el noroeste de México. Aparte de un ejemplar provisionalmente identificado por Phillips (1991) recolectado en el condado de Dutchess en el estado de Nueva York, todos los registros publicados de *M. t. calophonus* pertenecen a México. Aunque hemos determinado que esta asignación a Nueva York es incorrecta (el espécimen está sucio y por eso más oscuro de lo normal), al mismo tiempo encontramos un ejemplar válido de esta subespecie procediente de los Estados Unidos. Este fue recolectado por A. C. Twomey cerca de Ojo del Guajalote, Sierra de las Ánimas, condado de Hidalgo, estado de Nuevo México el 30 de junio de 1939 (Carnegie Museum of Natural History 124112). Además de

documentar este registro, discutimos la variación geográfica y la distribución de la guardabarranca de Townsend en el suroeste de Norteamérica.

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