



# Rio Mesa Banding Station

Spring 2025

## May 4th–May 12th

### *Weekly Summary*

We had high hopes for the beginning of May, but our capture rates were unusually low this week and we had three of our slowest days yet. We did have three days in a row with stormy afternoons and rain overnight. We were hoping the stormy weather would force migrating birds to land and refuel at our site, but the birds had other plans. There was a high amount of diversity among the birds we did catch and we're starting to see new birds around the property. Hopefully next week will be the week we start to see the volume of birds increase.

We caught a total of **31** birds of **19** species with **23** newly banded birds and **8** recaptures (no unbanded birds). Highlights from this week were the **9** new species we captured including our first chat (which we were all excited about), Pine Siskins, our first Wilson's Warbler, an American Robin, and an Ash-throated Flycatcher. Little birds took the week as our most banded bird was a tie between Wilson's Warbler and Pine Siskin, of which we banded three each. See tables for weekly species totals and season summary.



## Sunday May 4th

Opening/Closing Temp: 64.8°/75.2°

Hours Station Operated: 4.75

Number of birds banded: 1

Number of species: 1

Species Banded: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow

Notes: Strong winds forced us to close about half of the nets shortly after we opened, as well as close the station early. We managed to catch one bird in the opening round which ended up being the only bird we caught for the day.

Pictured: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (top)

Mountain White-crowned Sparrow (bottom)

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There are two different subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow we catch at the station: Gambel's and Mountain. One easy way to tell these two apart is by looking at the color of the upper lores. In the Gambel's these are pale grayish, and connect to the white eyebrow, or supercilium, like the bird in the top photo. In the Mountain, the upper lores are black and separate the supercilium from the lower lores like the bird in the bottom photo. The bill color is also noticeably different as Gambel's have a yellowish-orange bill and Mountain have a dark pink to brownish bill. Up until this week, we had only caught the Gambel's subspecies.

## Monday May 5th

Opening/Closing Temp: 51.9° /65.6°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 2

Number of species: 4

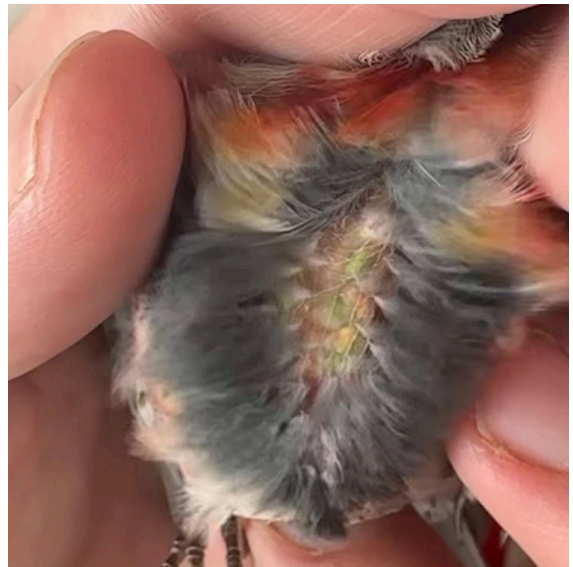
Species Banded: Green-tailed Towhee (2), and 1 each of Lazuli Bunting and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow

Recaptured Species: House Finch, Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow

Notes: Overnight storms turned into a cooler morning for us, that was a little slower than we expected. We did capture two new species for the season. One of those, the House Finch, we hear every day so it was nice to finally catch one.

Pictured: House Finch

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While you can find House Finches pretty much anywhere in the country (even in Hawaii!) they were originally a bird of the western US and Mexico. Their bright red color comes from the pigments in the food they eat while they are molting and it can be mixed with shades of orange and yellow. Older males tend to have more extensive and bright red than the younger males (like our second year male pictured here). Their diet consists of almost exclusively plant materials. Obviously there are plenty of food options at our site because our bird had a completely full crop when we caught it! You can see in the bottom photo a green mass where the feathers are blown apart, which is a view of the seeds and plant matter in its crop.





## Tuesday May 6th

Opening/Closing Temp: 42.4°/66.4°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 4

Number of species: 8

Species Banded: Wilson's Warbler, Plumbeous Vireo, House Finch, and American Robin

Recaptured Species: Lucy's Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Song Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler

Notes: Another cool day after an overnight storm. Bird activity picked up a little and each bird we caught was a different species. We added three new species to our season total.

Pictured: Plumbeous Vireo (top)

Wilson's Warbler (middle)

(bottom)

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The well-known black cap of the Wilson's Warbler is also a key feature used to help age and sex these birds. This handy figure categorizes the amount of black feathers, black feathers with green tipping, and green feathers in the crown. In the subspecies found in Utah, even the females can have a surprisingly large black cap. The Pyle guide specifies which option in the figure fits each age and sex combination. Our bird had a crown patch that matched letter E in length, but with all glossy black feathers that did not have green tipping. This, along with its bright yellow plumage, led us to decide it was a male.





Unless they show breeding characteristics, Pine Siskin can be hard to sex. It is thought that the extent and brightness of the amount of yellow in the flight feathers can help sex these birds, but there still needs to be more study. To show how much the amount of yellow varies, take a look at each of the three we caught. They all had different wing lengths that fell in the overlapping range between male and female and they all had a different amount of yellow in their primaries.



## Thursday May 8th

Opening/Closing Temp: 48.7°/73.2°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 0

Number of recaptures: 0

Notes: Our first day this season with 0 birds.

Conditions were good for banding, but for some reason we did not capture any birds. We did spot a couple of new species hanging around the station, a Black Phoebe and Lesser Goldfinches.

[eBird Checklist](#)



## Friday May 9th

Opening/Closing Temp: 53.7°/79.9°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 2

Number of Species: 2

Species Banded: Virginia's Warbler and Song Sparrow

Notes: Another day with really low capture rates, but at least we banded 2 birds! The flocks of goldfinches were flying between the cottonwoods again but did not manage to find their way into the nets.

Pictured: Virginia's Warbler

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This Virginia's Warbler is an example of a bird that is tricky to sex because it kind of shows both male and female characteristics. Looking at the wing photo, you can tell this bird is an after second year (DCA). The primary coverts are really dusky, well-edged and truncate. There is also an overall impression of uniform color and quality. The amount of yellow on the throat would point to a female, but the crown of an older female should be pale rufous and indistinct, and you shouldn't be able to see it this well without the feathers being lifted. An older male would have the darker rufous crown, but the yellow should be brighter and extending all the way across the chest and throat. With these conflicting features, for now we leave the bird as unknown sex.



## Monday May 12th

Opening/Closing Temp: 57.5° /86.9°

Hours Station Operated: 5.75

Number of birds banded: 9

Number of species: 8

Species Banded: Wilson's Warbler (2), 1 each of Mountain White-crowned Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, Gray Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Virginia's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Ash-throated Flycatcher

Notes: After the weekend off, we were back at the station. While we did have to deal with very hot temperatures, we did have a better day than at the end of last week. A highlight of the day was finally catching a Yellow-breasted Chat after hearing one calling nearly every single day.

Pictured: Ash-throated Flycatcher (top)

Yellow-breasted Chat (bottom)

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The Yellow-breasted Chat has a colorful backstory to match its bright chest. When first discovered, it was grouped with the thrushes in the genus *Turdus*. Later it was grouped with warblers in the genus *Icteria* and the family *Parulidae*. Genetic studies revealed that the Chat is actually a distinct family that is more closely related to the family *Icteridae*, which includes blackbirds, orioles, and meadowlarks. The result is that this species is now the sole member of family *Icteriidae*. They are known for skulking in the densest vegetation while belting their chaotic, improvisational songs. We are excited to see more of these charismatic birds! Stay tuned to learn more about their molt strategy in upcoming weeks.



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*Summary Table for 5/4 - 5/12*



New		Recaptures		Unbanded
PISI	3	GWCS	2	
WIWA	3	HOFI	1	
GTTO	2	LAZB	1	
GWCS	2	LUWA	1	
VIWA	2	OCWA	1	
AMRO	1	SOSP	1	
ATFL	1	SPTO	1	
BGGN	1			
GRFL	1			
HETH	1			
HOFI	1			
LAZB	1			
MWCS	1			
PLVI	1			
SOSP	1			
YBCH	1			
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

Totals for the season	
New Birds	105
Recap	28
Unbanded	3
Number of Species	34 (+1 recap only, +1

	unbanded only)
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