



Rio Mesa Banding Station

Spring 2025

April 27th-May 3rd

Weekly Summary

There was an overall increase in activity this week as our total of birds captured almost doubled. While it increased slightly from last week, our average number of birds each day is still in single digits. While it may not seem like we are catching many birds yet, there are new species showing up at the site every day. We've added Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Lazuli Bunting to our checklists and noticed a few more Audubon's Warblers hanging out. Hopefully as we get into next week, the volume of birds will also start to increase.

We caught a total of **42** birds of **18** species with 35 newly banded birds and 7 recaptures (no unbanded birds). Highlights from this week were the 11 new species we captured including 5 new warbler species, our first flycatcher, and a couple of fun surprises. Hermit Thrush took the lead as our most caught bird this week with 9 captures. See tables for weekly species totals and season summary.



Sunday April 27th

Opening/Closing Temp: 59.3°/69.6°

Hours Station Operated: 5.67

Number of birds banded: 6

Number of species: 5

Species Banded: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (2) and 1 each of Gray Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, and Red-naped Sapsucker

Notes: Gusty winds caused us to close a few nets throughout the day as well as close the station a little early. It was our first day hearing a chat nearby and we were all amazed to see the swallows flying low by the station. We were hoping one would swoop low enough to get caught in the net, but no luck today.

Pictured: Gray Flycatcher

[eBird Checklist](#)

Data sheet for *Empidonax* Flycatchers

LOC: _____ STATION: R.M.S.A. DATE: 04/27/25

SPECIES: G.R.F.L. BAND #: 305035842 INITIALS: LH

Please record all measurements in millimeters. Remember flycatchers have 10 primaries.

wing chord: 72 tail length: 61 wing - tail: 11

Circle the feather shape of p6? (circle one)

☒ emarginated ☐ not emarginated

longest p - longest s: 12.8 longest p - p8: 2.7

p6 - p10: 5.0 p9 - p5: 6.1

culmen from nares: 9.2 bill width: 5.0

Upperpart color (circle one or write description): green / olive / brown

Underpart color: white with buffy gray wash at throat

Eye-ring shape (circle one): lacking / indistinct / teardrop / round

Eye-ring color (circle one): white / buffy / yellow

Wing bar color (circle one): rich buff / light buff / yellow / white

Compare the lengths of p10 to p6, p5, and p4. Circle the description that applies for these primaries.

P10 is longer than / shorter than / or equal to in length to p6

P10 is longer than / shorter than / or equal to in length to p5

P10 is longer than / shorter than / or equal to in length to p4

Relative size & shape of bill (circle one). Indicate the color pattern of the lower mandible.

☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Leg color (circle one): Gray Blackish

Mouth-lining color (circle one): orangish / pinkish / yellowish / flesh

Additional notes: _____

Flycatchers in the genus *Empidonax* (referred to by many banders as Empids) are known for being extra tricky. Many of these birds look so similar that they can only be identified by song. Since they usually don't sing upon command, we often take extra measurements to help figure out the specific species of Empid being banded. Bill shape and color, the shape of the 6th primary feather, and differences in length between some of the primary feathers are particularly useful. Many stations record these extra measurements in a similar way as our Empid data sheet seen in the bottom photo.

Monday April 28th

Opening/Closing Temp: 51.4° / 79.5°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 8

Number of species: 5

Species Banded: Hermit Thrush (4), 1 each of Yellow Warbler, Bewick's Wren, Green-tailed Towhee, and Spotted Towhee

Notes: Our second day in a row with no recaps! A cool and breezy morning, warming up quickly by the end of the day. There was a little influx of Hermit Thrushes and added a few species to our list of birds banded for the season.

Pictured: Yellow Warbler

[eBird Checklist](#)

There are several different subspecies of Yellow Warbler, each with slight plumage variation. The subspecies found in the Southwest have more subdued plumage compared with the variety found in the East. The top photo, a male Southwestern bird, has less distinct red streaking compared to the male in the bottom photo from the East. This shows that it's important to be familiar with your local subspecies. If we were in the east, our bird might've been banded as a female or unknown sex.





Tuesday April 29th

Opening/Closing Temp: 32.9°/69.9°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 6

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 6

Species Banded: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (2), 1 each of Virginia's Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Myrtle Warbler, and Hermit Thrush

Recaptured Species: Lucy's Warbler (1)

Notes: Another day with adding new species! After hearing Blue-gray Gnatcatchers calling from the shrubs, one finally flew into the nets. We love how the male's eyebrows make them look so angry in the cutest way! We got really good looks at some low-flying White-throated Swifts that were zipping around by our banding building.

Pictured: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (top)

Myrtle Warbler (middle)

Unknown yellow-rumped/Audubon's comparison (bottom)

[eBird Checklist](#)



Yellow-rumped Warblers are split into two different subspecies, Myrtle Warblers(MYWA) and Audubon's Warblers(AUWA). While Myrtles mainly stick to the east and Audubon's to the west, there is some overlap and even hybridization between the two. One of the easiest way to tell the two species apart is the throat color, MYWA have a white throat that extends to curl up into the cheeks and AUWA have a yellow throat as seen in the bottom photo. There are some other differences that are more noticeable when you have the bird in hand, such as more white in the tail and greater coverts.

Wednesday April 30th

Opening/Closing Temp: 37.0°/69.4°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 4

Number of recaptures: 4

Number of species: 6

Species Banded: Mourning Dove (1), Juniper Titmouse (1), and Audubon's Warbler (2)

Recaptured Species: Hermit Thrush (2), Black-throated Sparrow (1), and Lucy's Wabler (1)

Notes: What a day of unusual catches! We were surprised to see two Mourning Doves in the net. One was able to free itself, which is normally what happens when these large birds find themselves in a net. We were also lucky enough to catch a Juniper Titmouse, of which only 10 individuals have ever been banded at the station. It was also



lovely to catch a return Black-throated Sparrow and to see the Lucy's Warbler recap starting to develop a brood patch.

Pictured: Morning Dove (top)

Black-throated Sparrow (middle and bottom)

[eBird Checklist](#)

Since this sparrow is from a previous season, we are able to look up when it was originally banded as a way to verify its age. That knowledge aside, this sparrow is a great example of an after second year bird. It has a uniform color throughout its whole wing, especially between the greater covs and primary covs. The primary covs are also a beautiful dusky color with wide silvery edging. In a second year bird, these feathers would be brown, abraded, and have little to no edging.



Thursday May 1st

Opening/Closing Temp: 50.1°/67.5°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 2

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 3

Species Banded: Green-tailed Towhee (1) and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (1)

Recaptured Species: Spotted Towhee (1)

Notes: Our third day in a row of pretty mild temperatures, with highs of less than 70° by the time we close. We had to delay opening the nets



due to rain. While the weather cleared up, we had a slower day compared to the last few.

Pictured: Green-tailed Towhee

[eBird Checklist](#)

The Green-tailed Towhees we've been catching have been pretty straightforward as far as ageing. After second year birds, or birds in their definitive basic plumage (like the one in our photo), have a uniformly bright green wing. The primary coverts are broad with distinct and broad green edging. The color green almost looks neon in the sunlight!

Saturday May 3rd

Opening/Closing Temp: 44.6°/76.7°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 9

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 8

Species Banded: 2 each of Gambel's

White-crowned Sparrow and Green-tailed Towhee,

1 each of Orange-crowned Warbler, Common

Yellowthroat, Lincoln's Sparrow, Song Sparrow and

Hermit Thrush

Recaptured Species: Lucy's Warbler (1)

Notes: We added two more new species and had our highest number of species in one day. There were also two new species seen around the station but not captured: Western Kingbird and Lazuli Bunting. We recaptured the Lucy's with a brood patch again, and this time she was carrying nesting material.

Pictured: Common Yellowthroat



The mask border of COYEs can vary from white, grayish white, to yellowish white. It can also vary in thickness, and we noticed right away that the after second year male we caught had an unusually large amount of white in his mask!

Summary Table for 4/27 - 5/3

New		Recaptures		Unbanded
GWCS	7	HETH	2	
HETH	7	BTSP	1	
GTTO	4	SPTO	1	
AUWA	2	LUWA	3	
LISP	2			
BEWR	1			
BGGN	1			
COYE	1			
GRFL	1			
JUTI	1			
MODO	1			
MYWA	1			
OCWA	1			
RNSA	1			
SOSP	1			

New		Recaptures	Unbanded
SPTO	1		
VIWA	1		
YEWA	1		
Total	35	7	0

Totals for the season	
New Birds	51
Recap	20
Unbanded	3
Number of Species	25 (+2 recap only, +1 unbanded only)