



# Rio Mesa Banding Station

Spring 2025

May 13th-May 19th

## *Weekly Summary*

There was a noticeable increase in activity this week as we more than doubled our capture rate from last week and saw our highest amount of species diversity so far! While we are still below average for the season, we are happy to finally be seeing more birds. Hopefully there is still a larger wave of migrants coming. The Mountain subspecies of White-crowned sparrow seemingly came out of nowhere as we went from one banded last week to catching 29 this week. We were so excited to see a Gray Catbird and a Northern Mockingbird in the nets; two species the station has not caught as often. Yellow warblers are also starting to make a showing with 10 captured this week and their cheery songs filling the station and the Yellow-breasted Chats are becoming bolder and moving around the area. We had a few visitors this week and it was great to get to know a few folks and enjoy the birds together.

We caught a total of **95** birds of **24** species with 76 newly banded birds, 18 recaptures, and 1 unbanded bird. Highlights from this week were 8 new species with many of those being larger birds like Blue Grosbeak, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Gray Catbird, and a Northern Mockingbird(!). Mountain White-crowned Sparrows were our most caught bird this week with 29 captures. See tables for weekly species totals and season summary.

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## Tuesday May 13th

Opening/Closing Temp: 70.2°/81.1°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 9

Number of recaptures: 2

Number of species: 7

Species Banded: MWCS (5), and one each of GWCS, BGGN, GTTO, and BUOR.

Recaptured Species: SPTO and LAZB

Notes: Despite closing a couple nets due to wind, we still had a good amount of birds. We did run into some hot weather towards the end of the day, but with a couple of extra hands from our visitors we were able to do our last couple of checks and the closing round quickly. Our first Bullock's Oriole of the season and a handful of Mountain White-crowned Sparrows made for an exciting day

Pictured: Lazuli Bunting

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While not as flashy as the males, I think female LAZB are equally as beautiful. The pictured bird is aged as After Second Year (Definitive Cycle Alternate) as you can see by the presence of lovely blue edging on the pp covs. The primaries and pp covs are also a uniform dusky gray color. A second year would have narrow, faded, and brown pp covs and also possibly have a molt limit among its primary feathers.

## Wednesday May 14th

Opening/Closing Temp: 55.5°/63.7°

Hours Station Operated: 5.75

Number of birds banded: 11

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 7

Species Banded: BGGN and MWCS (3 each), YBCH (2), and 1 each of RCKI, WIWA and BUOR

Recaptured Species: LAZB

Notes: Thankfully a much cooler day, although the day ended with very strong gusts of wind. The increase in wind was so strong and sudden we closed about 15 minutes early. More mountain white-crowns made their way into the nets and we were hit by a little group of female gnatcatchers.

Pictured: Yellow-breasted Chat





Yellow-breasted Chats are prime examples of molt limits in the primaries, also called eccentric molt. The individual pictured is a second year bird, with a mixture of juvenile and formative feathers present. Its outermost 5 primaries, highlighted in green, are newer formative feathers that look darker than the older juvenile feathers highlighted in yellow. Most of the second year chats we are seeing have really similar molt limits, with a couple even having some replaced secondaries as well.



## Thursday May 15th

Opening/Closing Temp: 42° /65°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 18

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of unbanded: 1

Number of species: 12

Species Banded: MWCS (5), YEWA (3), LAZB (2), one each of ATFL, SPTO, GTTO, BUOR, LUWA, DUFL, WIWA, VIWA

Recaptured species: YBCH

Unbanded species: LUWA

Notes: A cool and calm day and our highest amount of birds so far with 20 total. Southerly winds brought in some new birds and it was the first time in a little while we had seen new Lucy's Warblers (perhaps some late arrivals). There were also a few more orioles hanging out near the station in the cottonwoods, maybe they are the





three different individuals that have made their way into the nets this week.

Pictured: Bullock's Oriole

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Shown are three different plumages for Bullock's Oriole. The top photo is a stunning example of an after second year male. The middle photo is a second year male. They look quite different! This species is one of the handful we see at the station that takes two years to reach their adult plumage. We love seeing birds you can age and sex right away as you're pulling the bird out of the bag. The bottom photo is of a female. She is likely a second year due to some suspected juvenile wing and body feathers and the overall light coloring. An after second year female would have bright yellow to yellow-orange underparts and maybe even have a little bit of black mottling in the throat .

## Friday May 16th

Opening/Closing Temp: 54.1°/70.5°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 7

Number of recaptures: 3

Number of species: 6

Species Banded: MWCS (2) and one each of VIWA, YEWA, WAVI, BTSP, and YBCH

Recaptured Species: MWCS and YBCH

Notes: A little dip in the capture rate compared to yesterday, but overall still equal to or higher than previous weeks. We are still catching a fair amount of Mountain white-crowned sparrows, although we are starting to see some recaps that we processed earlier in the week. The highlight of our day was the Warbling Vireo and a new Black-throated Sparrow!

Pictured: Warbling Vireo (top)

Black-throated Sparrow (middle and bottom)

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Black-throated Sparrows are another species that can have an eccentric preformative molt. You can see in the photo that the 3 outermost primaries are significantly darker than the rest. They are also known to replace all the greater covs, median covs, rectrices, and secondaries. Quite an extensive preformative molt! It is hard to see in these pictures (I wanted to highlight the molt limit in the primaries!), but our bird had replaced all greater covs and tertials, but not all of the median covs and no secondaries.





## Saturday May 17th

Opening/Closing Temp: 57.7° /80.2°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 14

Number of recaptures: 5

Number of species: 8

Species Banded: MWCS (5), YEWA (3), BLGR (2), 1 each of LAZB, YBCH, and WETA

Recaptured Species: MWCS (4) and DUFL

Notes: Another day with beautiful, mild weather that finished a little on the warm side. Our capture rates stayed steady throughout the day and we added two more new species. We noticed a beautiful Western Tanager perched on the dead cottonwood and the next round it was captured in one of the nets. How can you choose which is more handsome between him and the Blue Grosbeak?!

Pictured: Western Tanager (top)

Blue Grosbeak (bottom)

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A great example of stunning after second year male plumage in each of these species. While there may not be an open wing photo to look at, the closed wing on each shows uniform color, black in the tanager and dusky dark gray with blue edging in the grosbeak. Other characteristics that point to asy in the tanager are the all yellow median covs and tips of the greater covs. The complete blue plumage is another indication of asy for the grosbeak



## Sunday May 18th

Opening/Closing Temp: 65.1°/59.8°

Hours Station Operated: 2.25

Number of birds banded: 10

Number of species: 8

Species Banded: MGWA and LAZB (2 each), 1 each of VIWA, YEWA, WIWA, MWCS, WETA, and BHGR

Notes: An interesting start to the morning with a large number of bats foraging, flying so low they almost ran into us as we were getting the building ready in the morning. One bat even bounced out of a net as we were opening! We closed after only a couple of hours due to dark clouds and a storm looming. Despite being open for only a couple of hours, we caught a fair amount of birds and even added a new species for the season. We are hoping that tomorrow will be just as birdy but with nicer weather!

Pictured: Black-headed Grosbeak

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Black-headed Grosbeak are another species with the delayed plumage maturation. The individual we caught (in the top and middle photos) is an after second year male, with a completely black head, uniformly black flight feathers, and less black and orange mottling on the back. You can compare that to the bottom photo of a second year male from a previous season. For their first fall and winter, the males look very similar to the females.





## Monday May 19th

Opening/Closing Temp: 40.9°/59.3°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 7

Number of recaptures: 6

Number of species: 8

Species banded: YEWA (2), 1 each of LAZB, MAGW, ATFL, GRCA and NOMO

Recaptured Species: LAZB (2), MWCS (2), SPTO, LUWA

Notes: The morning started out really chilly. Between the clouds and wind, it did not warm up very much. We had a few exciting birds in the morning, and then after about 9:30 the wind picked up, the bird activity quieted and we didn't catch many more birds. Interestingly, we caught just about as many recaps as new birds today, which shows birds were reluctant to migrate overnight.

Pictured: Northern Mockingbird (top)

Gray Catbird (middle and bottom)

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Today we get to showcase some birds that are not caught too often at the station, and they both happen to be in the family *Mimidae*. One thing that helped distinguish our NOMO as an after second year is eye color. The yellowish orange iris is present in asy birds compared to a gray or greenish iris in younger birds. Older birds can sometimes retain the greenish color, so while you don't want to rely solely on eye color for ageing. The gray catbird we caught was also an asy with wings that were a beautiful uniform silky gray color. I tried to zoom in on its upper half so you can see how nice the primary coverts are even with its wing closed. And of course we have to show off their classic rusty colored underfluffies!



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*Summary Table for 5/13 - 5/19*

New		Recaptures		Unbanded	
MWCS	22	MWCS	8	LUWA	1
YEWA	10	LAZB	4		
LAZB	6	SPTO	2		
BGGN	4	YBCH	2		
YBCH	4	DUFL	1		
BUOR	3	LUWA	1		
MGWA	3				
VIWA	3				
WIWA	3				
ATFL	2				
BLGR	2				
GTTO	2				
WETA	2				
BHGR	1				
BTSP	1				
DUFL	1				
GRCA	1				
GWCS	1				
LUWA	1				
NOMO	1				
RCKI	1				
SPTO	1				
WAVI	1				
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>1</b>

**Totals for the season**

New Birds	190
Recap	47
Unbanded	4
Number of Species	45 (+1 unbanded only)