



Rio Mesa Banding Station

Spring 2025

May 20th–May 26th

Weekly Summary

We started out the week with a slower day and a visit from the University of Utah's Geology Capstone class. From there we had a few busier days with an average of 24 birds/day that jumped up to 65 birds on Saturday! Our day with 65 birds was full of flycatchers, and all but a few were Willow Flycatchers! From there our numbers have steadily decreased again, back down to 13 by the end of the week. The wind has shifted back to coming from the North, which could deter some new migrants from moving through. Interestingly, while we haven't seen another bigger wave of migrants, the Willow Flycatchers were on the move again and had vacated the area by the next day. There was also a noticeable increase in the amount of hummingbirds in the area this week. We have not caught a hummingbird since our first week while this week we caught 5. We've also had some curious hummingbirds hovering near us, the banding building, and constantly visiting our feeder up by the house.

We caught a total of **180** birds of **27** species with **164** newly banded birds, 10 recaptures, and 6 unbanded birds. Highlights from this week were the wild flycatcher day, capturing a few more Blue Grosbeaks, capturing our first Lark Sparrows of the season, and the station getting busier overall. We added 5 more species to our list for the season: Lark Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher and Western Wood-pewee. No surprise that Willow Flycatchers were our most caught bird this week with 64 captures. Lazuli Buntings were our second most captured bird at 16. See tables for weekly species totals and season summary.



Tuesday May 20th

Opening/Closing Temp: 40.1°/66.8°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 9

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 6

Species Banded: YBCH (3), MWCS (2), 1 each of GRFL, MGWA, HOFI, SWTH

Recaptured Species: MWCS

Notes: The day started off chilly at only 40 degrees, but it warmed up nicely throughout the day unlike the chilly days at the end of last week. Unfortunately, the class visited us pretty early and there was very little bird activity (maybe due to the cold), but we did manage to catch one bird to show them. As the sun came out, bird activity picked up and we ended the day a little busier.

Pictured: Swainson's Thrush

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Swainson's Thrushes belong to the *Catharus* genus, including a group of 5 species found in North America that are referred to as the "olive-backed" group. One way to distinguish the Swainson's among this group is the distinct buffy/peach colored eye ring with the coloration continuing onto the cheek and throat. This bird was aged as after second year (definitive cycle basic) based on the uniform color and feather wear/quality throughout the greater coverts and primary coverts.

Wednesday May 21st

Opening/Closing Temp: 50°/78.7°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 18

Number of recaptures: 2

Number of unbanded: 1

Number of species: 11

Species Banded: LAZB (4); MWCS (3); 2 each of COYE and YBCH; and 1 each of WIWA, YEWA, BRSP, HOFI, WETA, SPTO, and GTTO

Recaptured Species: SPTO and YBCH

Notes: We were pleasantly surprised to catch over 20 birds today with a good amount of species diversity! The morning started out a little warmer than yesterday, the birds were more active, and we steadily captured birds throughout the day. We



also finally caught our first Brewer's Sparrow for the season.

Pictured: Brewer's Sparrow

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We were a little surprised to be this far into the season before we caught a Brewer's Sparrow! Ours was aged as a second year (first cycle alternate). The primary coverts are a lighter brown color and contrast pretty heavily with the greater coverts. The primary coverts also have mostly indistinct buffy edging. In an older bird, we would expect to see dark dusky brown primary coverts with broader white edging, that do not contrast with the greater coverts.



Thursday May 22nd

Opening/Closing Temp: 54.8°/83.8°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 19

Number of recaptures: 2

Number of unbanded: 1

Number of species: 11

Species Banded: YEWA (6); LAZB (3); 2 each of CHSP, MGWA, MWCS; 1 each of BRSP, BTSP, HOFI, and GTTO

Recaptured species: BGGN and LAZB

Unbanded species: Hummingbird Species

Notes: Another fairly birdy day for us with 22 birds captured. We had a warmer day overall with the temperature reaching into the 80's by the time we closed. The Yellow Warblers and Lazuli Buntings were fairly active, so it made sense that they were our most caught birds today. We also caught

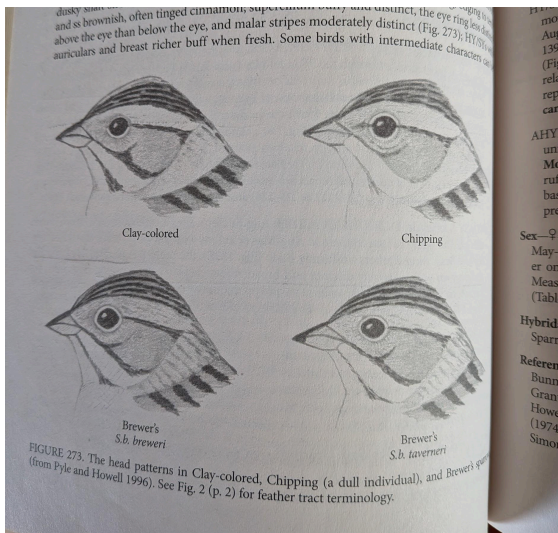


another Brewer's Sparrow and added another new species: Chipping Sparrow.

Pictured: Chipping Sparrow

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Chipping Sparrows are in the same genus as yesterday's bird of the day: *Spizella*. As you can tell in Pyle's figure of head patterns, they can be a little tricky to tell apart. While they are in alternate plumage, their bright rufous cap makes it more straightforward. Chipping Sparrows also have a slightly larger size and bill and their nape collar is distinctly gray. If you compare this bird with the Brewer's Sparrow above, you can see they also have a slightly different bill shape and color. Their rusty cap can also be a clue to their age: in the spring, younger birds may still have few to many black streaks in their cap while older birds should have very few to none.



Friday May 23rd

Opening/Closing Temp: 54.2°/87.2°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 28

Unbanded birds: 1

Number of species: 12

Species Banded: WIFL (7); WIWA (5); LAZB (4); 2 each of MGWA, ATFL, MWCS, BHGR; 1 each BRSP, WEWP, YBCH, and GRCA



Unbanded Species: Hummingbird Sp

Notes: A lovely and busy day! After starting out a little slow, the capture rate picked up and we were steadily busy for 4-5 rounds. The day warmed up fast so activity slowed down once we hit 9:30/10:00. It was the first day Willow flycatchers were in the area, and we caught quite a few! We also caught a Western Wood-Pewee and Lazuli Buntings and Wilson's Warblers were also quite prevalent.

Pictured: Willow Flycatcher (top)

Western Wood-pewee (middle and bottom)

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Here we have two birds that are both flycatchers and may get confused with each other, but in the hand have distinctly different characteristics.

You can tell pewees apart from Empidonax flycatchers from their much longer wing and their much shorter tarsus. Our peewee's wing measured 88mm, while most Empid wings measure between the upper 60-low 70mm range. Pewees also lack an eye ring, have a less distinct wing bar, and I think they have an overall darker coloration.



Saturday May 24th

Opening/Closing Temp: 50.7°/82.9°

Hours Station Operated: 5.5

Number of birds banded: 64

Number of recaptures: 1

Number of species: 10

Species Banded: WIFL (52); WIWA (3); 2 each of LAZB, YBCH; 1 each of BGGN, COYE, WETA, BLGR, MWCS, DUFL, UNFL

Recaptured Species: LAZB

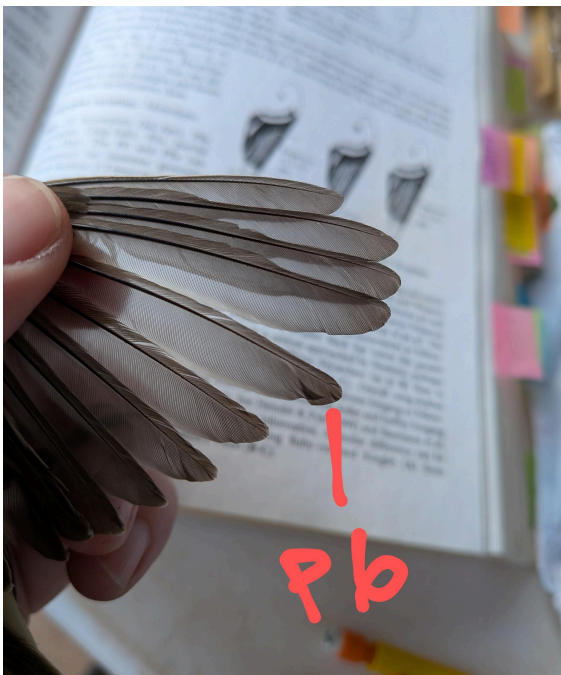
Notes: What a day! After things picked up yesterday, we thought it might be another busier day but we had no idea we were in store for flycatcher madness. Aside from the nets filling up with flycatchers, it sounded like there were "RITZbews" coming from every possible tree and bush. There were some other great birds around as well like more Wilson's Warblers, female buntings, and a lovely female Blue Grosbeak.

Pictured: Willow Flycatcher (top)

Photo showing P6 (middle)

Pyle diagrams for flycatcher ID (bottom)

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Worksheet for Empidonax Flycatchers

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

INITIALS: _____

Remember flycatchers have 10 primaries.

Length: _____ wing - tail: _____

one):

emarginated not emarginated

tail p - p6: _____

5: _____

Speaking of flycatchers, we can focus on the Willow Flycatcher and how to tell them apart from other empids. The main difference, especially among empids in the west, is the shape of primary 6 (p6). In Willows p6 is not emarginated, the feather has more or less the same shape along the outer web. You can compare p6 in the picture to the feather directly above it to see the difference between emarginated and not emarginated. Other notable features that set Willows apart are the indistinct eye ring, the almost entirely yellow/pink lower mandible without a dark tip, and a whitish throat.

Sunday May 25th

Opening/Closing Temp: 47.5°/81.5°

Hours Station Operated: 5.67

Number of birds banded: 15

Number of recaptures: 3

Unbanded birds: 2

Number of species: 9

Species Banded: WIFL (4); YBCH (3); 2 each of MWCS, LASP; 1 each of WIWA, YEWA, BLGR, and SPTO

Recaptured Species: BLGR (2) and YEWA

Unbanded Species: 2 BCHU

Notes: We were hoping for another big day, but it seemed like there were less birds around. Most if not all of the Willow Flycatchers from the previous day were absent. There was also a noticeable drop off in Lazuli activity as we went from capturing 3-4 per day to 0. The highlight of the day was capturing our first Lark Sparrows of the season. We see them flying around in the open fields near



the station but this is the first time they have ventured into the nets!

Pictured: Lark Sparrow

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It turns out that Lark Sparrows can have quite an extensive preformative molt. It usually includes all greater covs, 1-3 tertials, often 1-6 outer secondaries, 1-9 inner primaries, 1-3 outer primary coverts, and 0-12 rectrices. Almost 50% of young birds replace all of their flight feathers! In our bird, you can see there is a molt limit in the primaries, with the outer 5 being fresher and darker, and some darker feathers among the secondaries as well. It also looks like it replaced its whole tail. One reason why we look at multiple feather tracts when aging birds.





Monday May 26th

Opening/Closing Temp: 53.1° / 77.6°

Hours Station Operated: 6

Number of birds banded: 11

Number of recaptures: 1

Unbanded birds: 1

Number of species: 10

Species banded: 2 each of YBCH and COYE; 1 each of WETA, MWCS, ATFL, BRSP, LAZB, WIFL, and WAVI

Recaptured Species: YBCH

Unbanded Species: BCHU

Notes: Unfortunately another slower day for us. The weather was beautiful, if a tad bit windy, but there was not very much bird activity. We have noticed more Common Yellowthroats singing, so we were excited to see a couple in the nets. Even though we had less birds, there were still some nice highlights, like the Western Tanager, Brewer's Sparrow, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Warbling Vireo.

Pictured: Western Tanager

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This bird was a great example of an after second year (definitive cycle alternate) female Western Tanager. Immediately when you open the wing, you see a uniform dark dusky color, with a slight yellow-olive edging on the primary coverts and primaries. The median and greater coverts are also a dark dusky color with yellow tipping on the median coverts. These would be a lighter brown color in first cycle birds with thinner whitish fringing. Similar thoughts on the tail: dusky and truncate in asy's, brownish and more tapered in sy's. Other characteristics that point to asy are the bright yellow throat (dull yellow in sy's) and the bright yellow rump (dull olive in sy's).



Summary Table for 5/20 - 5/26

New		Recaptures		Unbanded	
WIFL	64	BLGR	2	BCHU	3
LAZB	14	LAZB	2	Humm Sp	2
MWCS	13	YBCH	2	MWCS	1
YBCH	13	BGGN	1		
WIWA	10	MWCS	1		
YEWA	8	SPTO	1		
COYE	5	YEWA	1		
MGWA	5				
BRSP	4				
ATFL	3				
HOFI	3				
WETA	3				
BHGR	2				
BLGR	2				
CHSP	2				
GTTO	2				
LASP	2				
SPTO	2				
BGGN	1				
BHSP	1				
DUFL	1				
GRCA	1				
GRFL	1				
SWTH	1				
UNFL	1				
WAVI	1				

New		Recaptures		Unbanded	
WIFL	64	BLGR	2	BCHU	3
LAZB	14	LAZB	2	Humm Sp	2
MWCS	13	YBCH	2	MWCS	1
YBCH	13	BGGN	1		
WIWA	10	MWCS	1		
YEWA	8	SPTO	1		
COYE	5	YEWA	1		
MGWA	5				
BRSP	4				
ATFL	3				
HOFI	3				
WETA	3				
BHGR	2				
BLGR	2				
CHSP	2				
GTTO	2				
LASP	2				
SPTO	2				
BGGN	1				
WEWP	1				
Total	180		10		6

Totals for the season	
New Birds	345
Recap	56

Unbanded	7
Number of Species	51 (+1 unbanded only)