RARE BIRD REPORTS

by **Nick Pulcinella**

Cinnamon Teal

Anas cyanoptera

Lancaster County

Nick Pulcinella

On 26 November 1994 I observed the male Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) that had been present at Octoraro Reservoir since 25 November. I watched the bird for approximately one hour at distances of 100–500 yards under a bright and cloudless afternoon sky. The sun was shining over my right side onto the reservoir. I was using Leitz 10X40 field glasses and a Kowa 20–60X scope. I was able to study the bird at rest and in flight. The bird was both wary and restless and frequently engaged in periodic flights around the lake together with Green-winged Teals (*Anas crecca*) in which they would fly in wide circles for a short time, land, and then take flight again in a few seconds. The bird's flight was strong and it appeared to be healthy.

General description. A duck smaller than a Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), but slightly larger than a Green-winged Teal. Overall color of head, back, and sides was dark cinnamon.

Underparts. When flying, the lower breast and belly appeared to be a light buffy-brown.

Upperwing. The upperwing was dark cinnamon with large pale blue patches in the mid-forewing. It was never close enough to me while flying to notice the smaller dark green patches on the wing.

Bill. Dark, longer and broader than a Green-winged Teal. This feature was very noticeable when the two species were together.

Other observers. Jim and Linda Waldie.

201 Elm Ave.
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Green-tailed Towhee

Pipilo chlorurus

Montgomery County

Nick Pulcinella

On 29 November 1994 I observed the Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*) that had been frequenting a feeder at 2649 Kutztown Rd., Perkiomen Heights since 27 November. I observed the bird for less than three minutes at a distance of about fifty yards through both Leitz 10X40 field glasses and a Kowa 30X scope. The bird was seen between 0730 and 0735. The sky was partly sunny and light was shining directly onto the bird feeder. The bird made several sorties to the feeder and fed aggressively in the company of White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*), Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), and Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*). Its appearances were always of a short duration and not allowing for a long, detailed study. After its fourth sortie it flew into the nearby cedars and from there it must have left because I waited for about 45 minutes and it never returned.

General appearance. An overall greenish-gray songbird slightly larger and longer than a White-throated Sparrow.

Head. Gray forehead and cheeks with a bright orange-brown cap. The throat was white, bordered on both sides by a vertical black mustache stripe that in turn was bordered by a vertical white stripe.

Upperparts. Greenish on the nape, back, and folded wings.

Underparts. Generally grayish. Undertail coverts were greenish.

Tail. Greenish-brown with a dark brown extending to the tip.

Bill. Conical shape.

Other observer. John Freiberg.

This is only the second record for Pennsylvania.

201 Elm Ave.
Swarthmore 19081

A Late Yellow Warbler

Centre County

Steven Feldstein

While observing a flock of Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) and several migrant wood warblers Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Cape May Warbler (*D. tigrina*), Black-throated Green Warbler (*D. virens*), Ted Floyd spotted a Yellow Warbler (*D. petechia*). Because of the late date, we considered the possibility that this bird may be a long distant migrant such as **D. p. rubiginosa**, also known commonly as "Alaska Yellow Warbler." This Yellow Warbler remained with the flock of chickadees and warblers, but did not interact with the other birds in any obvious way. Throughout the observation, I did not hear the Yellow Warbler call. This Yellow Warbler did not exhibit any distinctive behavior such as flicking its wings or raising and lowering its tail.

I will first discuss in detail the filed marks for the bird of interest. It should be noted that some of the following field marks will be compared with those for other subspecies of Yellow Warbler. Obviously these other subspecies were not present during the time of the observation, but this comparison is being made with subspecies for which I have extensive field experience.

The shape of this bird was typical for that of a warbler, as it was a small slender bird with a thin bill and square-shaped tail. The bird was also of similar size to the other Dendroica warblers present. Its nape, back, rump, and upper surface of its tail appeared to be uniformly olive-green in color. Also, its entire crown, with the exception of the front of its forehead, was the same shade of green as the rest of its upperparts. The front of the forehead of the bird was also green in color, but it showed a slight yellowish tinge. There was no evidence of streaking on its upperparts. Its wings were blackish with strongly contrasting yellow edges to the wing coverts and secondaries. I had the impression that the wings were darker than on the following two subspecies of Yellow Warbler, **D. p. aestiva** (subspecies which breeds in the eastern USA) and **D. p. morcomi** (subspecies which breeds from the Rockies westward). This darkness most likely accounted for great contrast in color between the dark wings and the yellow edges to its wing coverts and secondaries.

The breast of the bird was bright yellow in color, and I had the impression that it was just as bright as other subspecies of Yellow Warbler, such as **aestiva** and **morcomi**. The belly of the bird was noticeably paler than the

breast. The bird also had conspicuous reddish streaks on its breast and sides. Although this reddish streaking was very obvious, this streaking was obviously duller than the streaking on the above two subspecies of Yellow Warbler. Furthermore, these streaks seemed to be narrower and less continuous, i.e., the streaks appeared to be broken in places, as compared with the above two subspecies. The undertail coverts of the bird were very bright yellow, appearing brighter than the breast. There was no streaking on the undertail coverts. The undersurface of the tail was green with two large, bright yellow, oval-shaped spots. The shape of these tail spots was typical for a Dendroica warbler.

The face and throat of the bird was bright yellow, and its eye was black. Also, the bird seemed to have a hint of a dark eyeline. The bill was long and thin (like the bill of most Dendroica warblers) and the upper and lower mandibles of its bill were both black. There was no obvious eye-ring, nor any other obvious field marks on its face. The contrast between the black eye and yellow face did not seem as great as with **aestiva**. This was most likely because of the olive-green crown on the bird, whereas **aestiva** has a completely yellow crown.

The olive-green upperparts, yellow underparts with reddish streaking, yellow edges on the wings, and yellow tail spots clearly identify the bird as an adult male Yellow Warbler. Neither females nor immature males would show the amount of reddish streaking on the breast as this bird indicated.

The question of interest for this particular bird is the identification of subspecies. The entire olive-green crown, together with the yellowish tinge to the front of the forehead (many individuals show no yellow on the forehead), is the primary known field mark identification of **rubiginosa** (Curson et al. 1994; Godfrey 1986). **D. p. aestiva** has a completely yellow forehead, crown, and nape (Curson 1994), and **D. p. amnicola** (the subspecies that breeds across Canada and the interior of Alaska) has olive-green upperparts, including the crown and nape, with a bright yellow forehead (Godfrey). I do not have a reference for the color of the crown for **morcomi**. Thus, the color of the crown and forehead suggest that the bird is **rubiginosa**, but **amnicola** is similar to **rubiginosa**, nests to the north of Pennsylvania, and must migrate through the state. Therefore, for the remainder of this documentation, I will primarily compare **rubiginosa** with **amnicola**.

With regard to color of the underparts, Curson et al. (1994) indicate that **amnicola** is slightly duller than **aestiva**. They also state that **rubiginosa** has duller underparts than **amnicola**. However, no references I could find mention the contrast between the paler belly and brighter breast we saw on this bird. With regard to the breast streaking, Curson et al (1994) state that for **amnicola** it is narrower and darker than on **aestiva**. Also, for comparison, Curson et al (1994) note that **morcomi** has wider and paler streaking on its breast than **aestiva**. The bird that we saw also gave me the impression of having narrow breast streaking. However, Curson et al. (1994) do not mention the width of the breast streaking on **rubiginosa**. At the time of observation, I did not notice the darkness of the streaking.

As stated above, **amnicola** breeds to the north of Pennsylvania. According to the fifth edition of the AOU Checklist, **rubiginosa** breeds in coastal Alaska and British Columbia and winters on the west coast of Mexico and Central America. This suggests a migration along the west coast of the US, and in fact the fifth edition of the AOU Checklist states that **rubiginosa** is casual in migration to Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Thus, simply based on geography, **amnicola** would be more likely than **rubiginosa**. The late date could apply equally well to either subspecies, as both subspecies do nest as far away as Alaska. Also, Parkes (1968) assigned a bird collected at Powdermill Nature Reserve on 25 September 1966 in western Pennsylvania to **rubiginosa**. This comprised the northeasternmost record for **rubiginosa** up to that time. Furthermore, there has been an even later record of Yellow Warbler in Pennsylvania (Santner et al. 1992). However, no reference to subspecies was made.

I have extensive experience with both **aestiva** in the Northeast USA, and **morcomi** in Colorado, where I lived during the past three years. But, I have no field experience with **rubiginosa**. Also, although I assume I have seen many **amnicola** as migrants, I had not previously noted their field marks. Based on my above description, I strongly feel that the bird must be either **amnicola** or **rubiginosa**. Furthermore, the color of the forehead suggests that the bird is **rubiginosa**. However, one should always use caution when using a single fieldmark, i.e., the color of the forehead, for an identification. Other field marks indicated in the above description, such as the contrast between the color of the breast and belly, discontinuous streaking, and slight eyeline, are not indicated in the literature as being applicable to any particular subspecies. As a result, because very little has been published about identification of the various Yellow Warbler subspecies, it does not seem unreasonable to me for the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee to archive this documentation as either **amnicola** or **rubiginosa** until more is known about the field marks of these two subspecies of Yellow Warbler.

The notes for this documentation were written in the afternoon at home on the day of the observation. None of the references listed below, nor any field guide, was consulted until after the written description of the field marks for the above bird was completed.

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887 Grace St.
State College 16801