

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009.  
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

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The **Cedar Waxwing** is usually thought of as an obligate frugivore, that is it feeds on fruit and only on fruit. But that is not strictly true. Primarily in the breeding season they also eat insects and they feed their babies insects. Baby birds usually can not digest fruit and they need the protein to grow. John saw Cedar Waxwings flycatch this winter. The waxwings are believed to be closely related to the Silky-flycatchers, a family that includes the Phainopepla. Those birds eat fruit and insects and exhibit flycatching behavior.

**Nuttall's Woodpecker:** scarce in Golden Gate Park, scarce on the west side. Sometimes one gets established in an area and stays there for months. Abundant in oak woodland habitat on the east side of the peninsula. Don't seem to like the coastal fog. Joe has occasionally seen them at Pt Reyes. Established themselves at Lake Merrit. A permanent resident that has been expanding to some extent.

The Department of Fish and Game census waterfowl because they need to set bag limits for hunting based on population estimates.  
Birds tend to disperse away from the refuges after the hunting season is over, usually around mid-January. The birds then move into other wetlands where they would have been hunted. During the hunting season they are pushed into the non-hunting areas. There are more wetlands owned by duck clubs than by government agencies. Places like Sacramento Wildlife Refuge or Gray Lodge have tour loops right where the birds gather. Other places, like Los Baños, are not good during hunting season because the whole place is open to hunting, they don't let you birdwatch on hunting days (Sat, Sun and Wed).

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## Orioles

Members of the Icterids, the Blackbird family, that tend to be a little bit more colorful, often showing shades of orange or yellow coloration. They also tend to be somewhat more arboreal. Almost all species of orioles build a rather elaborate pendant type nest, a woven nest that is hanging from the tall limbs of shade trees. Most species in NA are migratory. These birds are not to be confused with Old World orioles, which are in a totally different family.  
All of these orioles have a rounded tail, the outer tail feathers are shorter than the central ones.

## Orchard Oriole

### OCCURRENCE

Eastern US and Canada, migratory.

Very common on the eastern seaboard. It is the most common oriole in the southeast, the Carolinas, the Roanoke River. In those areas the Baltimore Oriole is much more scarce. Otherwise the Baltimore Oriole seems to be more common, and to be better adapted to life around suburbs, human habitation and places where ornamental shade trees have been planted. At Pt Pelee in Ontario during migration Joe encountered pretty large numbers of Orchard Orioles. Winter in southern Central America and South America. Joe found amazing concentrations of

them in bamboo thickets in Panama. They come in from the countryside all over by the hundreds and roost in these thickets.

Rare but apparently regular vagrant to the west coast, including CA. Most records in the fall from late September and some records in the wintertime. Normally there are no orioles in CA in the wintertime, orioles are spring and summer birds. When an oriole is found in the wintertime it may not necessarily be the species you are expecting.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

The smallest of the orioles.

Tail relatively short compared to Hooded Oriole.

Tail appears shorter than wing.

Bill relatively short, just slightly curved, gives the bird a gentler expression compared to most other oriole species.

#### **Adult Male**

Close to being unmistakable.

Most of the other orioles cause considerable confusion and are subject to questionable identifications.

Head, back and tail all black.

Underparts, median coverts, rump and upper tail coverts are chestnut brown.

The overall pattern of the Orchard Oriole has some resemblance to the male Baltimore Oriole, if you take the chestnut and change it to orange.

#### **Immature Male**

It takes the male two years to get its full plumage.

In its first spring it is still yellow with a black bib and sometimes patches of chestnut, it then acquires its full plumage in the fall.

#### **Female**

Much more difficult to identify.

All yellow on the underparts.

(The Bullock's Oriole is another one that can be yellow in female-type plumage, it has a white belly. If you have an oriole that is all yellow underneath, it's probably not a Bullock's Oriole.)

Wing bars rather narrow but relatively crisp, contrasting dark bases to the secondaries (see Sibley).

Relatively large eye.

#### **VOCALIZATIONS**

Typical call note a low, thick chuck note. Something like that may also be given by the Hooded Oriole!

## **Hooded Oriole**

#### **OCCURRENCE**

Historically did not occur in northern CA, it ranged as far north as the deserts of southern CA, particularly in the Palm Springs and Thousand Palms area.

It is attached to the distribution of a fan palm called *Washingtonia*. They have been widely planted as street trees and ornamental trees throughout the Central Valley and along the coast of CA, the climate is ok, the trees survive. The birds weave their nests underneath dead hanging

palm fronds. The Hooded Oriole is well established now in northern CA, doing even better in the Central Valley where the weather is hotter than along the coast.

The status of the Hooded Oriole in winter in CA is unclear. They normally migrate out of the area. In midwinter, when yellow orioles with sort of a plain face and wing bars show up in CA, they are more likely to be Orchard Orioles than Hooded Orioles. Older winter records tend to be of Hooded Orioles, but people were assuming that the orioles they saw were west coast species. Reported winter Hooded Orioles from the past need to be reviewed for the possibility that they might have been Orchard Orioles. Now there have been a number of records of Orchard Orioles in SF during the wintertime while Joe cannot recall last time there was a Hooded Oriole in the winter in SF.

Telling winter female type Hooded from Orchard orioles is a huge problem in CA, a lot of people have had difficulties with some of these birds.

Both species pump their tails in an expressive manner, Hooded Oriole probably more so.

### **FIELD MARKS**

The ones that are found in the east, in southern Texas (subspecies *sennetti* and *cucullatus*) tend to be more orange, especially *cucullatus*. The ones in the west, California to New Mexico, tend to be more yellow in color (subspecies *nelsoni*). The western birds have longer, more slender bills, longer wings and shorter tails than the eastern birds.

All have longer bills, longer tails and shorter wings than Orchard Oriole.

The long downcurved bill gives them a mean look.

Tail appears longer than wing.

### **Adult Male**

Crown and nape all yellow or orange yellow, there is no hood (or there is a yellow hood). Black bib: the black comes around the eye and then down in a straight line.

White patch in the upper wing coverts and white on the tips of the greater coverts form two white wing bars.

All orange or yellow rump.

All black tail.

### **Winter Males similar to Streak-backed Oriole**

Back black in summer, strongly scaled in winter, especially on some of the younger birds, those birds can be confused with the Mexican Streak-backed Oriole.

Hooded Orioles have a longer, more curved bill than Streak-backed Orioles and the shape of the throat patch is a little bit different. On Hooded Oriole the black is coming around the eye and then down in a straight line forming the bib.

On the Streak-backed Oriole the black is pinched in under the chin, orange comes forward and narrows the black bib down, then the bib expands further down.

Notice on Hooded Oriole that if the head is turned the bib may appear to be pinched in.

Hooded Orioles are usually not here in the wintertime. A few years ago a Streak-backed Oriole was reported in the winter in Tucson, Arizona, it turned out to be a Hooded Oriole.

### **Comparison with Altamira Oriole**

The Altamira Oriole is confined to the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas where it used to be rare but is now common. It looks like a Hooded Oriole on steroids. It is much bigger.

The males and females are identical in appearance, while the females on the Hooded look quite different. The lesser coverts are orange (black and white on the Hooded). Bill shape straighter, bib more pitched in.

**Immature Male**

First year male similar to female, all yellow underneath, black confined to the throat area. First year male Bullock's Orioles can have a similar bib, but they tend to have much more white on the belly.

**Female**

Wing bars less crisp than on Orchard Oriole, no contrasting dark bases on the secondaries (see Sibley).

Can show a little pale on the flanks.

**Juvenile**

One slide was showing a bird with a gentle look in the rather large eye, a small bill, uniform yellow underparts. Looks identical to an Orchard Oriole but was photographed in June in SF (when we don't usually see Orchard Oriole, it is mostly found from late September into the wintertime when it does show up). An adult Hooded Oriole fed this bird. Juveniles recently out of the nest, with the bill and tail not fully grown, are basically indistinguishable from Orchard Orioles, but are still dependent on their adult parents. Can also show a little bit of pale on the flanks.

**VOCALIZATIONS**

Song like a thrasher, very soft, almost Catbird-like, consists of a lot of rattles, trills, whistles and little things. They hide in the dense shrubbery and sing.

Call note a rising whistled wheet, almost like a House Finch but even more whistled and louder and stronger, this is never given by the Orchard Oriole.

Hooded Orioles can also give a chuck-note similar to that of the Orchard Oriole. They also give chuck-notes in series, chuck-chuck-chuck-chuck-chuck or chu-chu-chu-chu-chu, almost like a Bullock's Oriole chatter. Especially the baby Hooded Orioles will give that little chatter note, and the babies are the ones that look just like Orchard Orioles!

**Northern Oriole: Baltimore Oriole + Bullocks Oriole**

For a while the Baltimore Oriole was lumped together with the Bullock's Oriole into the Northern Oriole.

These two species used not to be in contact since the Plains were a barrier to their dispersal. When trees got planted in the plains and provided suitable habitat for the orioles they started to expand their ranges. Finally they came into contact. Observations in the contact zone in Kansas and Oklahoma indicated that the birds were hybridizing rather freely. The presence of fertile hybrids suggested that perhaps these birds were only one species, so eventually the AOU decided to lump them under the name "Northern Oriole".

Later publications reevaluated the contact zones that had been studied earlier and found that there was less hybridization than before. The birds had apparently evolved some kind of isolating mechanism and were not interbreeding freely as they were in the earlier studies. Furthermore an additional study showed that the hybrids appeared to be of selective disadvantage over either parental type. There were also differences in the preferences for nest locations and a number of other factors that indicated that the decision to lump them was premature.

What has happened here is actually an evolutionary event. An isolating mechanism to prevent hybridization evolved because the hybrids have reduced fitness.

When birds come into contact for the first time it is not unusual for them to have a much higher degree of hybridization than later on. If hybrids have reduced fitness, individuals that prefer a

mate of their own species have a selective advantage over those that form hybrid pairs. The preference to choose a partner of the same species is selected for and an isolating mechanism that prevents hybridization evolves.

DNA studies found that the Baltimore and Bullock's orioles are not even each other's closest relatives. The Bullock's Oriole is much more closely related to the Black-backed Oriole, a Mexican species which looks quite different. The Bullock's Oriole and its known closest relative don't interbreed in their area of contact.

## **Baltimore Oriole**

### **OCCURRENCE**

The most common oriole in much of the East.

Scarce as a vagrant in the fall and winter in CA.

Orioles as vagrants in the winter in CA show up in flowering eucalyptus, particularly in southern CA and particularly in red flowering eucalyptus. The Bluegum Eucalyptus that we have around here is ok but it does not seem to be quite as attractive to orioles and tanagers.

Winter down in Costa Rica.

### **FIELD MARKS**

#### **Adult Male**

Bright orange with an all black hood.

Tail black with orange on the outer tail feathers.

Large orange patch on median and lesser coverts.

#### **Immature Male**

White patch on median and lesser coverts.

Young males or older females get a brownish hood, mostly orange, some pale on the flanks.

## **Bullock's Oriole**

### **OCCURRENCE**

The common oriole species here in CA throughout Savannah habitat (grassland with scattered oak trees). Also common in riparian habitat where the trees are tall. Very much a species of the East Bay, not a common bird in the city of SF. The breeding oriole in SF that you see in the summer is the Hooded Oriole. When you get over to Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Mount Diablo, the Central Valley, you find lots and lots of Bullock's Orioles. They avoid the coastal fog. They seem to have declined slightly. In the Jewel Lake area in the Berkeley hills and in Briones Regional Park they used to nest quite regularly, they stopped nesting there some years ago. But as soon as you get inland as far as Livermore, Mines Road, they are all over the place. There are plenty of them in the foothill region and around the foothills of the Central Valley, but as you get close to the coast they become scarce.

END OF NOTES.

UNFORTUNATELY I MISSED THE END OF CLASS AFTER THIS.