

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture March 25th, 2010.

Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

The **IOC World Bird List** has split the **Yellow-rumped Warbler** into Audubon's and Myrtle Warblers in NA and two other species outside NA. It is not likely that the AOU will follow any time soon.

In 1990 the **IOC (International Ornithological Congress)** appointed a committee to create a list of birds in the world with standardized English names because there often are different names in different parts of the English speaking world for the same bird.

Different competing lists which follow different taxonomies had different English names for the birds in the world.

Among these was a list produced by **Clements** in the US. Clements' list was taken over by Cornell University after his death, they have continued to publish updates annually. The most recent versions have subspecies as well as species names for every bird and brief descriptions of the ranges of each subspecies of every bird in the world.

In Britain there was a list produced by **Howard and Moore** which was being maintained by other people after the original authors passed.

A somewhat controversial list by **Sibley and Monroe** following their new taxonomy which was based primarily on DNA hybridization work that they had conducted.

People in the committee were not able to agree for a long time. Finally a list was published first as a book and now on the internet (www.worldbirdnames.org). Since it had the name IOC on it this list immediately got adopted around much of the world. The list differs in many significant ways from the AOU checklist and also from the South American checklist and from Clements' list. The IOC list is not approved in the Americas, it is rather disrespected. The IOC updates their list about every other month. Every time there is a new publication that proposes some change they act on it almost immediately. A lot of the updates are premature. The AOU moves much more slowly.

The **AOU** is a venerable committee of recognized taxonomists who have been working on this kind of thing and producing a checklist since about 1900 in the US. The committee consists of about a dozen highly respected taxonomists, all of them associated with either major universities or major museums. They had to put out a notice in the Auk basically saying that they are not following the IOC checklist. As far as Joe is concerned the authority is the AOU. Clements' list agrees almost slavishly with the AOU but it extends beyond that in that it also includes the foreign birds.

Some years back the ABA as an organization had to make a decision about listing. The ABA was founded to provide a service to people who keep lists. They have their own committees and they decided that when you submit your world list it must conform to Clements.

Another list that has also been going on at the same time is the **Handbook of the Birds of the World** which is edited by del Hoyo and is in English but was published in Spain by Lynx. They have their own taxonomy. It attempts to not only provide a list but to provide a description, a color plate, a brief life history, a range map and basically everything that you wanted to know about every bird in the whole world in book form. It is very good. Each chapter is written by a different authority, it has color photographs, most of them rather spectacular, showing interesting behavior. The introductions to the families are quite authoritative. It is brilliantly produced. It got very wide acceptance everywhere except in the US. It disagrees with a number of decisions that have been made or are pending by the AOU.

Three new species were added to the cumulative list for the **Cliff House field trip**.

A **White-winged Scoter** was a fly-by at some considerable distance. It was together with Surf Scoters and noticeably bigger than those. (Black Scoter is maybe seen once every five years. There are more Black Scoters down at Fort Funston or in Pacifica.)

Two **Western Bluebirds** by the baths and then two in Sutro Park. Joe thought they probably were the same birds, but somebody has seen four in the area earlier, so maybe they were different birds. This species has always been rare in the city, it seems to be increasing lately. They have nested successfully at least once in the Presidio, possibly also at other sites. They forage from a perch and then drop down and pounce on the ground for things like grasshoppers and leafhoppers. The habitat by the baths has changed. A lot of the flowering **Albizia** that used to cover the entire hillside has been removed and replaced by native plants. It seemed the bluebirds were taking advantage of the new open area that they now have to forage. Albizia looks like an Acacia. It is very good at stabilizing dune areas, which is probably why it was originally planted there. It blooms profusely in the wintertime. Lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers and hummingbirds used to forage in the flowers of the Albizia. **Yellow-rumped Warblers** staged a bit of a comeback. None last year, this year quite a few. Far fewer **hummingbirds** now than in the past.

Eurasian Collared Dove was in the park. That bird is in the process of trying to conquer the world. They were added to the state list only relatively recently.

Grouse

Pretty much restricted to NA and Eurasia.

Tend to be a little bit larger than quail or partridges.

Tend to be fairly secretive.

Many of the species have feathering on their legs all the way down to the toes, some of them even have feathering on their toes.

The ones that are here are rather cryptically colored.

Ruffed Grouse

OCCURRENCE

Fairly widespread. Tends to occur mostly in deciduous forests and woodland habitat across Canada and into New England and down the Appalachians. In the far west it becomes more scarce. In CA it barely reaches some sites in Del Norte and Trinity counties and possibly down into Humboldt County.

It is one of the most difficult breeding birds in CA to add to your state list.

A friend of Joe's who did a study on the birds said their status in CA is unchanged since Grinnell and Miller mapped them around 1944. It is still rare, still found in the same places.

There are very few known sites. Many of them are on private property. Even in areas where the birds are known to be finding them is extremely tricky. They tend to sit very, very still, often high up in a tree.

The best way of finding them is to get information on where the males are strutting. Early in the morning the males get out into an open area and start to walk out on usually a fallen log and make a very low pitched thumping sound by beating their wings rapidly against their chest. They start before dawn and end shortly after dawn. You need to camp out near where they are drumming. They were fairly common when Joe grew up in downstate New York.

FIELD MARKS

Male and female look about the same.

A bit of a pointed crest.

No colored comb.

A rather long barred tail with a broad black subterminal band and gray terminal band.

Most males have the black band complete, but not all of them. In females it is broken in the middle. It is not reliably possible to tell males from females except by their behavior.

Females don't drum and strut and display the way males do.

Buffy streaks on the shoulders.

Broad barring down the flanks. Quite a lot of white and dark barring and spotting on the entire underparts to the undertail coverts.

Occurs in two color morphs, a gray morph and a red morph in which the plumage is a bright orange brown color. The birds that are found in CA are all gray morph birds.

Spruce Grouse**OCCURRENCE**

Spruce forests across Canada into the Maritime Provinces and up into Alaska. Clear across Canada to Newfoundland and Labrador.

It penetrates into the northern states a little bit. It does not reach CA, has never been recorded.

The spruce tree does not occur in CA except very locally, there are no large enough stands to support Spruce Grouse populations.

Very approachable once you find them. Finding them is the hard part. Many of the local people use the name "fool hen" for it.

FIELD MARKS

Similar in many ways to Sooty and Dusky grouse (formerly one species: Blue Grouse).

In the eastern part of their range where Blue Grouse don't occur they are not easily confused with anything else.

The eastern subspecies group ("Taiga" in Sibley) lacks the white bars on the uppertail coverts.

The Franklin subspecies in the west has more white on the uppertail coverts which helps distinguish them from Blue Grouse.

Subspecies vary in amount of cinnamon brown at the tip of the short dark tail, more in the eastern subspecies

Male

A fairly dark gray bird.

Red combs over the eye.

Black throat and breast outlined by white markings.

A lot of white spangling on the entire underparts.

Female

Underparts with a triangular tessellated pattern in gray and white almost looking like an Escher painting.

VOCALIZATIONS

Rather poorly known. Give some kind of cackling sounds apparently. Sibley says that the male gives extremely low hoots. That is wrong, based on misidentifications. A common statement in other field guides, got perpetuated in the literature, including some recordings that are claimed to be Spruce Grouse that are actually Sooty or Dusky.

Blue Grouse

Now split into Sooty and Dusky grouse. Come together in parts of British Columbia and southeastern Alaska. In some parts of those areas they seem to intergrade. They do have different displays, may be an isolating mechanism to reduce hybridization.

Sooty Grouse

OCCURRENCE

The one that occurs in CA. Found in the Sierra Nevada, mostly at middle to high elevations. Permanent residents there. Range in the coastal mountains south as far as Sonoma County where they are local. The closest place where they can be found is Rock Pile Road which used to be open, now fenced off. A gravel road that runs west of Warm Springs Dam and gets you into some Sooty Grouse habitat.

There are some nice spots on the east side of the Sierra where the birds can be found fairly regularly. In Yosemite look around Glacier Point just up at the top of the Glacier Point Four Mile Trail. Look for them around open areas and clearings that have fallen logs. Sometimes they will be sitting out and displaying on these fallen logs. One of the best places to see them is probably no longer any good. Along the Tioga Pass Road, called Olmstead Point. A parking lot near where the exfoliating granite displays are. There is usually a fairly tame Marmot hanging around the garbage and people feed it. You used to be able to listen from that parking lot and hear the Sooty Grouse. There are not many trees to look there, yet it is surprising how easily a huge dark bird can disappear in a scraggly conifer. They look like a piece of bark.

These grouse can be relatively tame in areas where they are not hunted such as Yosemite National Park. In areas where they are hunted they are quite skittish.

FIELD MARKS

Some gray on the tip of the tail, more than Dusky Grouse.

Male

Rather uniform bluish slate gray coloration.

Combs of skin are raised above each eye.

When displaying they spread the feathers at the side of the neck showing the white feather bases in a ring around an inflated air sac of very wrinkled yellow skin, like a sunny side up egg on the side of the bird. A recent article in Western Birds shows that some Sooty Grouse have purple air sacs.

Also do a display that involves drooping the wings and dragging them on the ground while strutting.

Female

Best distinguished from Dusky by range.

Notice the gray tips to the tail.

Never a really red color, sort of dark bluish.

Mixture of gray and white on the underparts.

Larger than Spruce Grouse.

Decidedly darker than any Spruce Grouse on the underparts.

Very finely patterned, more marbled than Spruce Grouse.

Not the striping of the Ruffed Grouse.

VOCALIZATIONS

You can hear the calling from the early morning and all day long.

The males sometimes display from the ground, but mostly they get up into a tree and inflate the yellow air sac.

Both species have a very low pitched hooting call that sounds almost like blowing air over a jar.

Dusky Grouse**OCCURRENCE**

Rocky Mountains.

FIELD MARKS

Air sac purple, smaller, less wrinkled than on Sooty Grouse.

More white feathering around the air sac.

Very little gray on the tip of the tail.

Display itself different, a running or fling display is given by Dusky.