

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
2469 Hammertown Road
Narvon, PA 17555

June, 10, 1996

Steven Feldstein
887 Grace Street
State College, PA 16801

Dear Steve,

Thank you for submitting details on the "Alaskan Yellow Warbler" (*Dendroica petechia rubiginosa*) you saw at Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County on 1 October 1994 to P.O.R.C. After careful review, we regret that we are unable to accept this record. The committee felt that the documentation submitted does not adequately rule out the possibility of *D. p. amnicola*. This does not mean of course, that the bird was not a *D. p. rubiginosa*, merely, that the details did not allow for a concrete determination.

We hope that this does not discourage you from submitting documentation on any rare birds you find in the future. Please be encouraged to send as much detail as possible.

Sincerely,

Nick Pulcinella
Chairman

Record # 731-01-1994

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V8/4

Observer: Steven Feldstein

Species: Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)

Subspecies: *D. p. rubiginosa* (Alaskan Yellow Warbler)

Date and time of observation: October 1, 1994, 11:00 am.

Weather: Overcast with scattered drizzle

Duration of observation: Approx. 3 minutes

Bird-sun orientation: Sun not visible due to overcast conditions

Distance from bird: Approx. 10 meters

Optical equipment: Zeiss 10X40 binoculars and Bushnell Spacemaster 22X wide angle spotting scope.

Location: At the southern end of Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County, Pennsylvania.

Habitat: In a group of deciduous trees with a height of about 5 metres. The tree species was not identified.

Other observers: Ted Floyd

While observing a flock of Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) and several migrant wood warblers Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*), Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*), Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*), Ted Floyd spotted a Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica 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 "Alaskan 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 field 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 mostly 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 for identification of *rubiginosa* (Curson et al, 1994; Godfrey, 1986). *D. p. aestiva* has a completely yellow forehead, crown, and nape (Curson et al, 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, 1986). 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*. Curson et al. (1994) 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 the 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 on September 25, 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 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, were consulted until after the written description of the field marks for the above bird was completed.

References:

American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds, fifth edition, 1957. 691 pp.

Curson, J., D. Quinn, and D. Beadle, 1994: Warblers of the Americas. Houghton-Mifflin. 252 pp.

Godfrey, W. E., 1986: The bird of Canada. National Museum of Canada. 595 pp.

Parkes, K. C., 1968. Some bird records from western Pennsylvania: Wilson Bulletin, 80, 100-102.

Santner, S. J., D. W. Brauning, G. Schwalbe, and P. W. Schwalbe, 1992: Annotated list of the birds of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Biological Survey. 59 pp.



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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia rubiginosa*)

Date of Sighting: 1 October 1994 to 1 October 1994

Location: BALD EAGLE STATE PARK

County: CENTRE

Observer(s): Steven Feldstein

Date of Submission: 1994

Submitted by: Steven Feldstein

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas								X
N. Pulcinella				X				
E. Kwater								X
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams				X				
P. Schwalbe						X		
S. Feldstein								X
TOTALS			1	2		1		2
DECISION				X				

Comments:

?

Signature (Secretary):

F. C. Haas

Date:

5-1-96