

FIRST DOCUMENTED RECORD OF A PAINTED BUNTING FOR THE INTERIOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Gail Spittler

RR 1, Site 4, Compartment 16, Kaslo, BC V0G 1M0

The Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) is a small, common finch that breeds in two disjunct populations in the southern United States and northern Mexico. The western population breeds primarily in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana while an eastern population breeds locally on the Atlantic coast from North Carolina south to northern Florida. The western group winters in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama while the eastern breeders winter in the Florida Keys, Florida peninsula, Bahamas and Cuba (Lowther et. al 1999).

Unlike most other passerines, the Painted Bunting migrates after the breeding season to staging areas to moult before continuing its southward autumn migration. The western population moults in southern Arizona, Sonora, and northern Sinaloa, Mexico (Thompson 1991).

Each year a few vagrants are reported north of the breeding range including California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Oregon, Quebec, Utah, and Wisconsin (Lowther et al. 1999).

On 14 August 2007, an adult male Painted Bunting was sighted in the small rural community of Johnsons Landing located on the northeast shore of Kootenay Lake, ~28 km northeast of Kaslo, British Columbia. The bunting appeared around 1300 hrs. as I was sitting down to lunch. It was perched atop a bird feeder (Figure 1) which is located about 10 m south of the dining room window. I was able to quickly photograph the bird before it flew off in a southerly direction. The bunting returned in the early evening and was observed from 1840 to 1940 hrs. feeding on the ground beneath a hanging bird feeder, apparently eating seed tossed there by birds previously at the feeder.

The following day, the Painted Bunting made a brief appearance around 0720 hrs. Again it fed on



Figure 1. A male Painted Bunting at Johnsons Landing, BC. 14 August 2007 (Gail Spitler). BC Photo 3574.

birdseed on the ground. It was last seen by a friend, Gwen Nicol, at 0845 hrs, for about 15 minutes on 16 August as it perched on a limb of a large black walnut tree near where the other sightings occurred.

On the Pacific coast of North America, the Painted Bunting is currently considered a very rare spring and autumn transient in California (Roberson 1980, Small 1994) and a vagrant in Oregon (Nehls 2006), Washington (Wahl 2005), and British Columbia (this paper).

There does not appear to be a general pattern of dispersal for occurrences on the west coast. Roberson (1980) summarized 17 records for California that ranged between 31 August and 13 November with most records in September. Later Small (1994) mentioned, "An average of about 1-2 per year are recorded. A few arrive in August, about one-half in September, and a few during October and November." In Oregon, Painted Buntings have been reported in June, October, November, and December and in Washington in February and March.

There are two other records of Painted Bunting for the province, both from the extreme southwest coast. A male was present, and photographed, in Richmond from 1 to 4 August 1995 and a female was photographed at a feeder in Brentwood Bay,

on southern Vancouver Island, from 21 March to 5 April 2007. Both of these records are currently under review.

Acknowledgments

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About the Author

Gail moved to the West Kootenays after taking early retirement from academia in 1989. She is an avid birder and wildlife enthusiast.