

SPECIES:

Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus perdix*)rec'd 12-11-96
accepted 7-0

DATE:

November 2, 1996

TIME(S) OF OBSERVATION:

11:15; and on-and-off from 12:00 to 15:50. The longest continuous view (no diving) was 12:20-12:50. All times in this report are Mountain Standard Time (MST).

LOCATION:

Chatfield Reservoir SRA, Jefferson County, Colorado

HABITAT:

Fresh-water reservoir on the Eastern high plains at the base of the Rocky Mountains.

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THIS BIRD:

Steve Stachowiak, 8675 South Cresthill Lane, Highlands Ranch, Colorado 80126
Jack Reddall, 4450 South Alton Street, Englewood, Colorado 80111
Dick Schottler, 25 South Indiana Place #1A, Golden, Colorado 80401
Norm Erthal, 7761 Everett Way, Arvada, Colorado 80005
J.B. Hayes, 1517 West Briarwood Avenue, Littleton, Colorado 80120
Glenn Hageman, 448 South Leyden Street, Denver, Colorado 80224
Other observers available upon request.

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT I USED:

Zeiss 10x40 Binoculars
Bausch & Lomb Elite 77mm spotting scope (20-60x zoom eyepiece)

WEATHER CONDITIONS:

SKY: Clear all day
WIND: 11:15 - South 5 mph
12:45 and after - West 10-15 mph
TEMP: 58-65F

BIRD/SUN ORIENTATION:

Bright sunlight during the entire time that the bird was under observation.

11:15 - Direct sunlight shining upon the bird from the left

12:20 - 13:15 - Direct sunlight shining upon the bird from behind the observer

13:15 - 15:50 - Varied; sun shining directly upon the bird both from the left and from behind the observer.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD AND HOW MEASURED:

Varied from 12 yards to 900 yards (best estimate)

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN:

1 (one)

SEX:

Unknown

PLUMAGE:

Basic plumage (Winter)

BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR:

The bird was first seen at 11:15 while it was swimming and diving. I was at the North Boat Ramp parking lot (see map on page 8) and the bird was in the water approximately 30 yards out from the shore at the Massey Draw parking lot. Approximately 50 American Coots (*Fulica americana*) were swimming and diving nearby as well as two basic plumaged Common Loons (*Gavia immer*). The murrelet was a little further out in the water than the coots. After my initial long distance look, I decided to drive to the Massey Draw parking lot for a much closer view. When I arrived the bird was gone! I relocated the bird about 45 minutes later, straight out from the Handicapped Fisherman's access peninsula at the South end of the lake. At this time (12:00) the bird was just swimming around, not diving, and staying in the same general area. The murrelet did dive once to get away from a large fast moving boat. The bird did not seem to mind the quiet slow-moving boats and did not dive nor try to get away from them. After confirming my observation, I then went to the marina payphone and started calling people. At 12:20 I returned to the peninsula. For the next half hour the bird just swam on the surface and looked around. About 12:50 the bird started swimming and diving. The bird would surface for about 10-15 seconds and then dive and remain underwater for 20-40 seconds. Just before a dive, the murrelet would stretch its head and neck out across the water as if it was laying on the water. The bird would then "jump" slightly and raise its wings up slightly over its back and then go underwater head first. I lost sight of the bird for about 45 minutes. Then, while scanning the water with my scope, I saw the bird fly through my field of view! The bird flew from the water near the Plum Creek delta past the Handicapped Fisherman's access peninsula to the middle of the reservoir. The wing beat was very rapid and the flight was fast and direct. In flight, the bird looked "chunky" and

the wings looked ridiculously short and very thin. The bird "dropped" into the water with a splash instead of a smooth "glide-like" landing. I did observe the bird surface from a dive on two occasions with a small minnow-like fish in his bill. On one occasion, he proceeded to swallow the fish head-first and began diving again about 30 seconds later. Starting about 13:30 the murrelet began feeding even more actively. The bird would again be down for about 20-35 seconds, but only stayed on the surface of the water for about 4 seconds on average between dives. This made it very difficult to get a scope on him before he dived again.

During my observations of this bird it seemed to ignore all the other birds on the lake. The only interaction between this bird and another was when an adult California Gull (*Larus californicus*) swooped down to try to get a fish that the murrelet brought up after a dive. The murrelet responded by immediately diving with the fish still in his bill.

Other than the initial sighting, in the water near the Massey Draw parking lot, the bird stayed out in the deeper waters of Chatfield (see map). The bird was never observed preening.

SIZE:

Smaller than nearby American Coots (*Fulica americana*) and much smaller than the numerous Western Grebes (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) that were present.

HEAD & NECK:

In direct sunlight, the back of the neck was black, with a slight brownish tint, as was the cap on the head. The cap extended down from the crown to just below the eyes. The neck appeared very short, giving the impression that the bird had almost no neck at all. The throat and sides of the neck were immaculate white. Long, straight, sloping forehead. The dark of the crown started at the mandibles and extended almost straight back, beneath the eye, to the rear of the neck. A pale gray irregular patch was observed on each side of the back of the head/neck (see sketch). I could not tell if these patches were separate or if they met at the nape.

EYES & LORES:

The irises were black (blended in with the color of the head). There was no eye ring of any kind. The lores were black (same color as the rest of the crown).

LOWER & UPPER MANDIBLES:

Black; Both the upper and lower mandibles appeared to be the same length and straight.

LEGS & FEET:

The legs and feet were not seen during my observation.

UPPERPARTS:

Back and rump were dark gray. A white "bar" was seen on the sides of the back just above the wings. This white bar had several black "lines" coming up from the wings below (see sketch).

UNDERPARTS:

The sides (below the wings), flanks, breast and belly were immaculate white (seen while bird was diving and while the bird was in flight). The white on the flanks extended up the back to a height equal to the white bar above the wings (see sketch). The undertail coverts were also immaculate white.

RETRICES:

The retrices were very short, dark gray and "propped up" or "held up" like a Ruddy Duck's (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) tail, only much shorter (see sketch).

WINGS:**UPPERWINGS:**

Black; Short, very narrow and somewhat rounded. The wings did not reach the tail when the bird was swimming.

UNDERWINGS:

Did not see the underwings well.

VOCALIZATION:

No vocalizations were heard.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES (WINTER ADULTS IN ALL CASES):

Murres & Guillemots - Much larger with longer necks and bills that are much thicker or longer.

Puffins - Larger than this bird with huge bills that are not black.

Auklets - Small, stubby, bills that are not black. All auklets lack the white wing bars of a Marbled Murrelet except Least Auklet (see below). Auklets generally have rounded heads and lack the long, straight sloping forehead of a Marbled Murrelet. Auklets have gray or dirty white sides. Throats and/or chins of all auklets are gray or dirty white. The irises of all auklets are yellow.

Least Auklet - Has black wings and a white bar above the wings and a white throat like a Marbled Murrelet but has a black chin and a shorter, stubbier bill which Marbled Murrelets lack. Irises yellow not black like a murrelet's iris.

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) - Has a long neck (compared to a murrelet) and lacks the white bar above the wings. The black of the face extends down well below the eye. Eared Grebe also shows a "pointed" crown. In winter the front and sides of the neck, sides and flanks are dirty white not clean white like a Marbled Murrelet.

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) - Has a long neck (compared to a murrelet) and lacks the white bar above the wings. Horned Grebe has a greater slope to the forehead than a murrelet and a slightly longer bill. In winter the sides and flanks are dirty white not clean white like a Marbled Murrelet.

Kittlitz's Murrelet (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) - Dark of crown does not extend down to below the eyes (eyes are in the white of the face). Bill much shorter than a Marbled Murrelet. Although Kittlitz's has a white bar above the wings, it also shows white tips to the secondaries whereas a Marbled Murrelet shows pure black wings.

All other murrelets - No other murrelets have a white "bar" above the wings.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

Eared Grebe - Have seen thousands in Colorado over the last eleven years in all plumages.

Horned Grebe - Have seen thousands in Colorado over the last eleven years in all plumages.

Marbled Murrelet - Have seen only one (nominant race) off of Point Pinos in Monterey, California in November 1988.

Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) - Have seen only one, Chatfield Reservoir, Jefferson County, Colorado December 5, 1995.

I have no experience with other alcids.

BOOKS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADVICE CONSULTED THAT INFLUENCED THIS REPORT:

- 1) National Geographic Society "Field Guide to the Birds of North America" Second Edition was consulted for scientific names used in this report and for comparisons to birds that I have no experience with.
- 2) National Audubon Society Field Notes, Volume 50, Number 2 (Summer 1996), Page 220 was used to determine what race this murrelet belonged to.

COMMENTS:

I believe this to be the Asiatic or "long-billed" race (*B.m. perdix*) because:

- 1) This bird did not have any white on the lores,
- 2) no dark band or markings extended from the wings or neck onto the breast or chest,
- 3) this bird had a pale patch on the back of each side of the head, and
- 4) the black of the crown was pretty much a straight line from the bill back to the back side of the neck and did not "drop down" lower.

This report was written from the notes taken in the field while observing this bird (see attached).

NAME:

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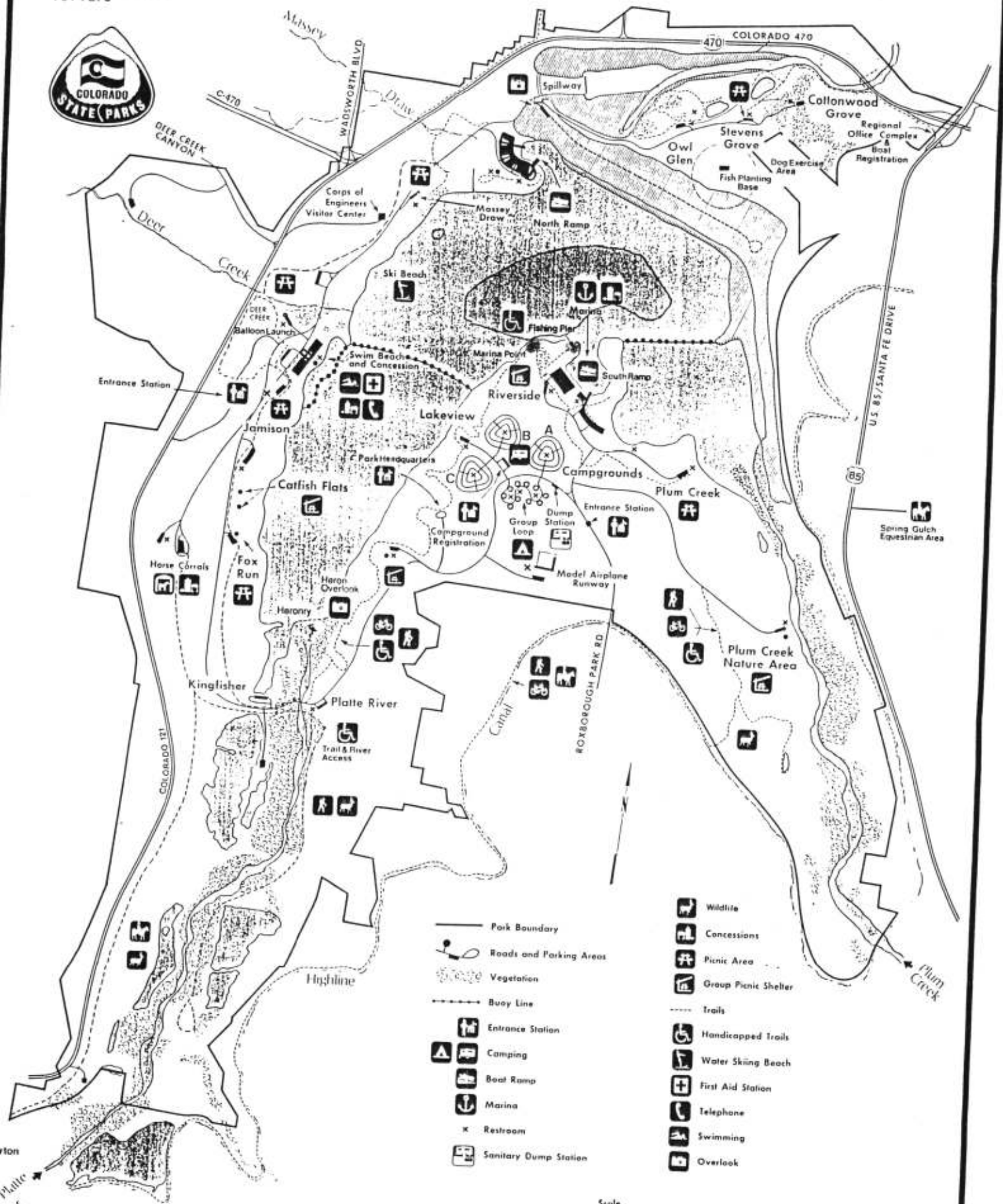
SIGNATURE: DATE: 11/3/96

CHATFIELD State Park

11500 N. Roxborough Park Rd.
Littleton, CO 80125
791-7275



○ = observer's position when bird was initially found
● = observer's position during the afternoon
○ = birds observed position throughout the day



- Park Boundary
- Roads and Parking Areas
- Vegetation
- Buoy Line
- Entrance Station
- Camping
- Boat Ramp
- Marina
- Restroom
- Sanitary Dump Station
- Wildlife
- Concessions
- Picnic Area
- Group Picnic Shelter
- Trails
- Handicapped Trails
- Water Skiing Beach
- First Aid Station
- Telephone
- Swimming
- Overlook