

Mark O. Chichester

1 May 1993

Mt. Piños → Sawmill Mtn., Ventura-Kern Co., CA

0821 - 1440

1 hr hike from Chula Vista to Piños M. <sup>8831'</sup> crowane

1 1/2 hr hike to Sawmill Mtn. 8150'

Roger Chichester, Susan Chichester + Megan  
spent the brilliantly clear day hiking in surprisingly deep  
and plentiful snow. The road to the old Condor  
Observation site was closed at Chula Vista parking area.  
It may not clear to open for quite some time.

80-90% snow cover was present on the entire  
hike. The only clear areas were southwest  
exposures of Mt Piños + smaller ridges with  
south or southwest exposure + rocks.

Snow depths were probably as deep as 5-6'  
in places. Amusing were the shrub/brush loving  
Green-tailed Towhees perched atop small  
protruding tips of large ridges or cecanothus  
thickets on the flat exposures of Mt Piños -  
Singing their hearts out.

Temperatures were cool at the outset w/ firm  
snow  $\approx$  40°F. Coming back in the afternoon  
the snow was heavy, wet, slick + soft in spots.  
Much tougher going on the return.

Temps allowed hiking in shorts + T-shirts - but  
Oh the sunburn on the backs of my legs from  
snow reflection.

There was good potential today for Gray crowned  
Rosy-finch as many beetles were on the snow.

1. OSPREY - 1 Flying N bound between Piños and <sup>Sawmill.</sup>
- 2 Turkey Vulture 2 Sawmill
3. BLUE GROUSE - 2 see details following
4. Band-tailed Pigeon 8
- 5 Hairy Woodpecker 1
- 6 Mountain Quail 5
- 7 White-headed Woodpecker 10
- 8 N. Flicker - 1 atop Sawmill

no checklist

- ~~Yellow-rumped Warbler~~ ~~Dendroica coronata~~  
1 May 1993 continued  
Mt. Piños → Sawmill Mtn. Kern Co., CA
9. Dusky Flycatcher - many vocal in trees
  - 10 Western Wood Pewee 2
  - 11 PURPLE MARTIN - 1 moving N - loosely associating w/ a group of VGSW NW of the top of Sawmill
  - 12 Violet-green Swallow - abundant
  - 13 Stellers Jay
  - 14 Clerks Nutcracker 9
  - 15 Common Raven 2
  - 16 Mountain Chickadee
  - 17 Pinyon Nuthatch many
  - 18 Western Bluebird 11
  - 19 Am. Robin 6
  - \* 20 Am. Pipit 3
  - 21 Yellow-rumped Warbler
  - 22 Green-tailed Towhee 15
  - 23 Fox Sparrow - common & vocal on territories
  - 24 Dark-eyed Junco
  - 25 Brown-headed Cowbird 5
  - 26 Cassin's Finch 4 ♂ singing from tree tops  
1 ♀

Blue Grouse *Dendragapus obscurus howardi*

Dad did what I thought would never happen - discovered two Blue Grouse in Kern County, on Sawmill Mtn. We had spent 2 1/2 hours hiking primarily on snow since leaving Chula Vista parking lot. Snow had obscured much of the trail so we were going x-country up the East face of Sawmill Mtn. I was some distance up the hillside from Dad (Roger Chichester) who had tired of walking on snow. He was crossing a south face ridge which was devoid of snow, though steeper than most of the area. He flushed the birds when they were 10-15' from him. His written notes describe how he saw the birds on wing as they passed over the

Mark C. Chickster  
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Blue Grouse *Dendrogeopys obscurus howardi*  
Sawmill Mtn, Kern Co, CA

top of the rocky ridge they were flushed from + passed on to the N allowing a view of the side + mostly rear. He called out "Blue Grouse" which Susan, (between Dad + I) heard. Susan relayed the call to me. I froze, presuming they had heard vocalizations - all we heard was my heart pounding. I soon became aware that I must descend to where Dad was to see or hear better. I moved forward in the direction of the flushed birds flight. As I did I crossed the ridge, these birds must have flown through the boughs of a few fir trees to pass on a distance.

I then heard several diagnostic "booms" 3-5 not 7 or 8 as is typical. It was followed by a few low clucks. Then all was silent. I presumed that the birds were paired - the ♂ booming + female clucking to relocate one another after being disturbed while feeding. I worked the area, searching for birds in the nearby trees + on to the next ridge to the N with no luck. I also grilled Dad at the site of the flushing. - we concluded that they flushed from a budding Ribes shrub on the rocky slope.

As I grilled Dad for details (a field guide was not available) he described his view highlighting the explosive, frightening ~~explosive~~ of the flushing birds. They were double the size of quail. Brown / gray mottling was the best he could do w/ overall color + a fanned gray tail. + a band on the tip.

When we reached the peak, he agreed to write up a short statement in my pocket note book.

The birds were probably silently feeding for the 45 minutes prior to the encounter. We had taken a hike break  $\approx$  1/4 mile away + would

YMC - In clusters  
1 May 1993 cont

Blue Grouse *Dendrocygpus obscurus howardi*

~~Black-throated Gray Warbler~~ *Dendroica nigrescens*  
Sawmill Mtn Kern Co CA

likely have heard them during this time

Records from this area are sparse or absent in recent years. Among the birding community, this is probably the first record since 1964.

A hiker reported & described a female on 2 Aug 1992 in Ventura Co Slope (SW) of Sawmill Mtn. as well as a "heard" flush of a grouse on the N slope of Grouse Mtn (Kern Co). - Larry W. Allen

The campground host of McGill reported a ♂ at McGill Campground on 10 July 1991. This report is viewed as spurious by field ornithologists - Gordon Bower.

Files copied from Los Padres N.F. hold records as follows - 1 ♂ 1 ♀ 8 October 1974 on the south side of Grouse Mtn. - Andy Woodcock & Tim Mosko.

2 females between Mt Pinos & Sawmill Mtn in ~~the~~ August 1973 - Dave Kessler.

A USFS - Mt Pinos Blue Grouse Study Report FY 1979 surveyed most of the range in these mountains using tapes & transects Steve Weiss. No grouse sightings were produced by the study but a Forest Service employee reported seeing one (♂?) on Atam Mtn on 12 July. This same report summarizes all records for the region known to USFS.