

## Status and Occurrence of Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Don Cecile.

### Introduction and Distribution

The Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) has five distinct subspecies, of which 3 are found in North America (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The subspecies of Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*) is found breeding in California in the Coast range as far north as Humboldt County, where it is localized in the lowlands, foothills, and interior valleys, throughout the Central Valley north to Shasta County, throughout the interior of southern California, including the Mojave and Colorado Deserts, east to the Colorado River, and north in eastern California to Owens Valley and Panamint Mountains of Inyo County California distribution has been expanding northward (Garrett and Dunn 1981, Small 1994, Jaramillo and Burke 1999). East of California, the Hooded Oriole breeds in southern Nevada, north to Esmeralda, Nye, and Lincoln Counties (Pleasants and Albano 2001), extreme southwestern Utah in the Virgin River valley (Behle *et al.* 1985), throughout central and southern Arizona, south of Mogollon Plateau, and generally north to the central Mohave, northern Yavapai, northern Gila, northern Graham, and northern Greenlee Counties, but largely absent from southwest corner of state (Pleasants and Albano 2001), southwestern New Mexico, generally north to Grant, southern Sierra, and Doña Ana Counties (Hubbard 1978) and in west Texas, where the range is localized (Rappole and Blacklock 1994, Pleasants and Albano 2001), The second and nominate subspecies of the Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus cucullatus*) is found in El Paso County, Brewster County, and along the Rio Grande from the lower Pecos River east to the coast and north to at least Val Verde, Sutton, Atascosa, and Nueces Counties (Rappole and Blacklock 1994, Pleasants and Albano 2001). There is also a third more localized subspecies of the Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus sennetti*) found in this region of the Lower Rio Grande and is found more in Mexico (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

In Mexico, all five subspecies of the Hooded Oriole are found (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There are 2 subspecies of Hooded Oriole that breed throughout Baja California (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). These include the subspecies (*Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*) on the northern portion of the Baja and (*Icterus cucullatus trochilodius*) that is confined to the southern of Baja California (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Hooded Oriole subspecies (*Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*) is also found in northernmost Chihuahua, throughout Sonora, except largely absent from westernmost areas and extreme southern coast (Russell and Monson 1998), and northernmost Sinaloa (Howell and Webb 2010, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The nominate subspecies of Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus cucullatus*) is also found breeding from northeastern Coahuila, part of Nuevo León, and parts of Tamaulipas, south along the Atlantic slope through coastal Veracruz to northern Chiapas, west Campeche (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus sennetti*) extends south from the southernmost Texas along the Gulf Coast into

northeastern Mexico also along the Gulf Coast in Tamaulipas and eastern Nuevo León (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The last subspecies of Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus igneus*) is found on the Yucatán, and east to Quintana Roo (Howell and Webb 2010, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This same subspecies of Hooded Oriole is also found south to northeastern Belize, including offshore islands of both countries (Howell and Webb 2010, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The Hooded Oriole winters in Mexico throughout Baja California Sur, except some northern areas, from the extreme southern Sonora Coast, south along the Pacific slope to central Oaxaca; and on Atlantic slope, from southern Tamaulipas, south through the remainder of the breeding range (Howell and Webb 2010).

There are small numbers that winter in southwestern United States from coastal southern California and southern Arizona, and southern Texas (Pleasants and Albano 2001).

In recent decades with the planting of Fan Palm Trees (*Washingtonia filifera*), and similar Palm Tree species, which are the preferred nesting tree of the Hooded Oriole, this species has undergone a northward expansion of its breeding range into northern California (Roberson 1980, Small 1994). The Hooded Oriole was first recorded in Oregon on May 15, 1963 (Browning 1960). Since that time the frequency of Hooded Oriole occurrences has steadily increased (OFO 2012). The Hooded Oriole is now an annual species in Oregon with over 30 accepted state records by the Oregon Bird Records Committee and is no longer on the committee's review list of species (OFO 2012). In Washington State, the Hooded Oriole is a casual to accidental species with 9 accepted records by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2013).

In British Columbia, the Hooded Oriole is a casually occurring species with over 20 Provincial records (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The Hooded Oriole has not been recorded in Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2013), but is accidental in the Yukon (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Hooded Oriole is a casually occurring species in Louisiana with a few records from scattered locations north of its normal range in the eastern United States (Pleasants and Albano 2001). The Hooded Oriole is an accidental species in Ontario with a couple of Provincial records (OBRC 2015). There is also one record for Matapedia, Quebec in November 1998 (Bain and Shannon 1998).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Hooded Oriole is covered in all standard North American field guides. The following description of the Hooded Oriole is taken from Pleasants and Albano (2001). The Hooded Oriole is a medium-sized oriole with a total length of 18–20 cm and a mass of about 24

grams. Compared with other orioles the Hooded Oriole has a relatively long, rounded tail, and long, slender, decurved bill. The adult males and females differ greatly in plumage, but only slightly in size with the females averaging slightly smaller in body length.

The adult male has entirely orange or orange-yellow head, nape, rump, and underparts with the colour most intense on head, even tinged scarlet in some southern races. There is a black bib, and narrow mask that extends from the lores and the auriculars from just behind eye, down to upper breast in a nearly straight line. The back is black, although fringed with olive and appearing scalloped when in fresh plumage and also in the late fall and winter. The tail is black, slender, relatively long, and strongly graduated, giving it a rounded tip, which is narrowly fringed with white when feathers are fresh. The wings are black with 2 white wing-bars, the upper one which includes the tips of median-coverts, is wide and bold, the lower one narrow is created by narrow white edging to greater-coverts, this edging is widest on tips of the feathers and has narrowly whitish- or grayish-edged flight feathers, especially on the tertial feathers.

The adult female is similar in shape to the male, but quite different in plumage. Adult females are olive-yellow on the head, rump, and tail with more olive and greenish edging, and the underparts, which are variably a bright yellow, especially on the breast. On some individuals the flanks are washed with gray. The back is a dull grayish-olive contrasting with a yellower and greener head and rump. The gray may be tinged with brownish feathers and extends faintly up the hind neck to the nape and crown. The wings are dusky or grayish-black and patterned as in the male with 2 wing-bars, with the upper one much stronger and wider.

The immature male resembles the adult female, but with a black bib and mask that is somewhat less extensive than on the adult male and some adult females may have a few black feathers on throat. The immature female looks like the adult female. The juvenile birds also look like the adult female, but have buffy wing-bars, a duller overall colouration tinged olive-brown on the upperparts. The bill is often short and not noticeably decurved, as on the adult.

The song of the Hooded Oriole is a series of whistles, trills and rattles (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The calls of the Hooded Oriole include a distinctive whistled rising “wheet” (Sibley 2000). The flight call of the Hooded Oriole is a sharp, rising metallic “veek” (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

By far the biggest identification challenge in British Columbia is separating female and immature plumages of the Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) from the Hooded Oriole (Zimmer 1985). The Orchard Oriole is an accidental species in British Columbia with only 7 Provincial records (Toochin 2013). The Orchard Oriole has a short bill with only a slight decurve, and has

rather uniform bright-yellow underparts and bright-green upperparts, and relatively short, square-ended tail. The call of the Orchard Oriole is a sharp “*chuk*”, which is quite different from the Hooded Oriole’s whistled “*wheet*” call note. The separation of these 2 species is covered in all standard field guides, but for a more in depth discussion observers are encouraged to read Jaramillo and Burke (1999).

Both the Bullock’s Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) and Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) are significantly different in size and colouration from the Hooded Oriole and should not cause observers any identification issues (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Both of these species are covered in standard North American Field Guides and should be easy to identify.

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Hooded Oriole is a casually occurring species in British Columbia with 21 Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). So far all Provincial records appear to pertain to the Hooded Oriole subspecies (*Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*) which is found in California (Wahl *et al.* 2005, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This subspecies has had a large northward expansion of its range into northern California and the continual expansion of the Hooded Oriole’s range helps explain the timing of our Provincial records (Small 1994, Campbell *et al.* 2001). By far the month of May, with 12 records, has the highest number of observations than any other month during the year (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1 and 2). Out of these records, 8 are of adult male birds, and the remaining 4 of them 1<sup>st</sup> summer males (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). There are no documented observations of females yet for British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The high record for the month of May is mirrored in records from Oregon and Washington State (OFO 2012, WBRC 2013). The months of April, June, July, September and November all have 2 records each (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 2). The months of August and October have no Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 2). Amazingly there are 3 winter Provincial records spanning the months of December, January, February and March (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 2). The Hooded Oriole has occurred in a few regions of the Province. There are 9 records for Vancouver Island, 5 records for the Fraser Valley area, 4 records for the Vancouver area, 1 record for Powell River, 1 record for Terrace and 1 record for the Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The only Provincial record of a reported Hooded Oriole that was not an adult male or 1<sup>st</sup> year male was of an immature bird reported at Jordan River on September 22, 2013 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). There were no photographs obtained of this bird and the written description that was posted to public chat groups better favoured the very similar looking Orchard Oriole (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). There were some private doubts raised by some experts about the identity of this bird as the description matched very closely that of an Orchard Oriole, and there have been several fall reports recently of female-type Orchard Orioles from Cape Flattery and from Sooke to Tofino at the

exact time of year (Toochin 2013). There are to date very few fall records of Hooded Orioles for British Columbia and especially in the fall there is just as much chance of a bird like this one being an Orchard Oriole. Observers should try to obtain good photos of future records or write up extensive field notes due to the difficulty of separating immature Hooded and Orchard Orioles.

Many Provincial records of the Hooded Oriole come from birds feeding at hummingbird feeders (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). This is true of other Oriole species and this behavior has made it so likely many more records have been located by observers that are back yard enthusiast's (Jaramillo and Burke 1999). The Hooded Oriole has the ability to overshoot as a long distance vagrant. Incredible records have been photographed in northern British Columbia in Terrace and Tlell (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). It seems likely that this species could show up in other previously unreported areas of the province. This is a species that should be looked for by keen observers in the future, especially those that feed hummingbirds.



Figure 1: Record #12: Hooded Oriole 1<sup>st</sup> summer male at north Qualicum Beach on May 24, 2009. Photo © Michael Ashbee.



Figure 2: Record #13: Hooded Oriole adult male at Tlell on the Queen Charlotte Islands, May 25, 2010. Photo © Jason Shafto/[www.fullmoonphoto.ca](http://www.fullmoonphoto.ca)

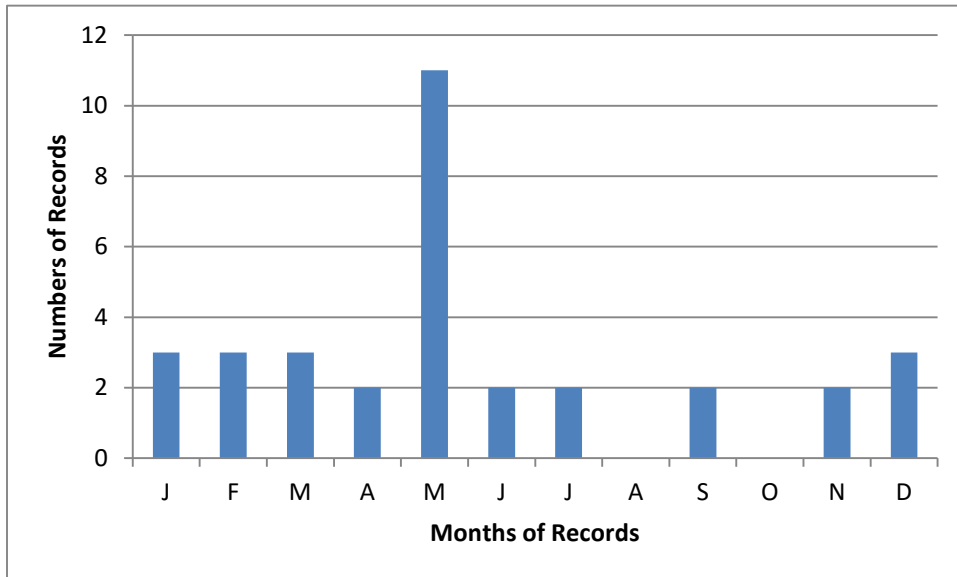
**Table 1: Records of Hooded Oriole for British Columbia:**

- 1.(1) adult male May 24, 1978: Mr. & Mrs. W. Williams, and other observers: Oak Bay, Victoria (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 2.(1) adult male May 6-7, 1996: B. & A. Wallis, mobs (photo) Sidney near Victoria (Wallis 1996, Pearce 1996, Bowling 1996c, Davidson 1999)
- 3.(1) adult male May 25, 1996: L., V., C. & T. Austin: at feeder in yard near Mundy Park, Coquitlam (Bowling 1996c)
- 4.(1) adult male July 19, 1997: (photo) Esquimalt Lagoon, Colwood (Bain and Holder 1997d, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 5.(1) adult male September 19, 1997: Jack E. Williams, Dorothy Williams: Blackie Spit, White Rock, Surrey (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 6.(1) adult male November 19, 1997- April 2, 1998: C. Thomas, mobs (BC Photo 1788) Terrace (Bowling 1998a, Bowling 1998c, Davidson 1999)
- 7.(1) adult male December 31, 2000-March 29, 2001: Kay & John Lackner, Rick Toochin, mobs (photo) 7620 #3 Rd, Richmond (Cecile 2001a, Cecile 2001b, Toochin 2012a)
- 8.(1) adult male May 27, 2002: Moreen Williams: at nectar feeder at 18160 21A Ave., South Surrey (Toochin 2012a)



- 9.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> summer male June 23, 2002: Thor Manson: Cheam Wetlands, Popkum (Toochin 2012c)
- 10.(1) adult male singing July 3, 2003: Thor Manson: Cheam Wetlands, Popkum (Toochin 2012c)
- 11.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> summer male May 31, 2006: Kathy Stewart: Eagle Point Community Park, Harrison Mills (Toochin 2012c)
- 12.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> summer male May 24, 2009: Mike Ashbee, Cat Ashbee (photo) north Qualicum Beach (M. Ashbee Pers. Comm.)
- 13.(1) adult male May 25-26, 2010: Jason Shafto, Christine Santino (photo) Tlell, QCI (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 14.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> year male June 20, 2010: *fide Mike Yip* (photo) Little Qualicum River area (M. Yip Pers. Comm.)
- 15.(1) adult male April 13, 2013: Bob & Rita Valine (photo) Powel River (Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 16.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> summer male May 26, 2013: Rick Toochin, Jack Delair: Hope Airport (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 17.(1) adult male May 27, 2013: S. Peterson: Cadboro Bay, Victoria (Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 18.(1) immature September 22, 2013: Jeremy Kimm: Jordan River (Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 19.(1) adult male November 30- March 30, 2014: *fide Jackie Childering*, mobs (photo) Port McNeill (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.)
- 20.(1) adult male May 24, 2014: mobs (photo) Jelinek Place, Metchosin (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.)
- 21.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> summer male May 5-6, 2015: Carol Baird (photo) 8562 Broadway St., Chilliwack (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)

**Table 2: Seasonal distribution of Hooded Oriole records in British Columbia:**



**Table 2:** Note the sharply defined occurrence in the spring for this species with May clearly having the highest number of records

### **Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank Barbara McKee for editing the manuscript of this article. We also wish to thank Michael Ashbee and Jason Shafto/[www.fullmoonphoto.ca](http://www.fullmoonphoto.ca) for allowing us to use their excellent photographs of recent Provincial records from Qualicum Beach and Tlell. We also wish to thank Russell Cannings and Melissa Hafting for giving us details on recent Hooded Oriole records from around the Province. All photographs are used in here with the permission of the photographer and are protected by copyright law. Photographs are not to be reproduced, published or retransmitted on any website without the authorization of the photographer.

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