

Majestic Feathers



Where Magic, Avian Science, and Beauty Merge

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On Wings From Eurasia

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Looking up the species mentioned in the newsletter in your field guide as you read it can be an enjoyable way to become more familiar with the birds.

Feeling a bit weary on Saturday, April 8th, after just arriving home from Island Park where I had spent the better part of the previous night recording the spring mating calls of Boreal Owls for a video production that I am working on, I was glad to be settling into my easy chair for an evening of movie viewing. Just as I had settled in, I caught a glimpse of brilliant orange, and focused in on a bird perched just outside the window in the front yard. Instantly my brain registered, "That bird doesn't belong here!" I jumped up and grabbed my binoculars that are always handy because I love to get a close up view of the arriving spring migrants at my feeders. I spied the bird on the ground feeding on black oil seed and exclaimed, "Oh, my gosh! I think it's a Brambling!" By this time my household, including the dog, picked up on my excitement and rushed to the window. I grabbed a camera, focused in on the bird through the window, and fired off a volley of images. A quick review in my field guide confirmed that it was a Brambling, a rarity in Idaho!

In high adrenaline mode, a physiological state experienced by avid bird watchers when a rare bird is encountered, and no longer even a bit weary, I started the Bird Alert phone chain. Within thirty minutes Poo Wright-Pulliam, Brian and Deb Sturges, Jean Seymour, and Dave and Renae Spaulding were in my yard celebrating this exclusive sighting.



Taken through the windowpane between slightly lifted mini-blinds, this is among the first shots that I took of the Brambling.

Next I placed a message on <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ible/Linked Electronically> so that the members statewide would know about our Bellevue Brambling.



Hopeful visiting birders.

By Sunday morning I had emails and calls coming in from birders from around Idaho notifying me that they were on their way. Mike Haldeman from Coeur d'Alene wrote that he was on his way and asked that I call him periodically with updates on the bird. Jay Carlisle from the Idaho Bird Observatory was driving over from eastern Idaho where he was conducting a bird survey. The street in front of my home on South 7th became active with birders beginning at 7:30 a.m. and continued through sunset. Neighbors and passersby stopped to find out what was going on and joined in the search to see the visiting bird. In total

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Thank you for your interest and appreciation of the birds!

on Sunday, and all but one reported seeing the Brambling.

The reader is likely asking why the near hysteria over a bird? Here is the answer to that question. The Brambling, a sparrow-sized member of the finch family, is widespread throughout the forests of northern Europe and Asia in the spring and summer and winters in southern Europe, north Africa, India, China, and Japan. Not Idaho! It is such a rare occurrence to find a Brambling in Idaho, in fact, that there are only two records of the bird in this state and approximately 25 records in the lower forty-eight states. So, having a Brambling show up in Bellevue offers a rare opportunity for bird watching enthusiasts to see one and add it to their life lists.

Many people have asked me the following questions: How did it get here? How long will it stay? Is it lonely? Is it healthy? Why *your* yard? My best guess about how it got here is that it either flew too high and got caught in a jet stream, which carried it here, or it was seized in a storm that deposited it near here. No one knows how long it might stay in the area. The bird is active and alert showing no signs of disease. As for lonely, well, it is a very long shot that it will find a mate anywhere around here! But the good news is that the Brambling appears to be well accepted by the other members of the finch family that it is hanging out with. Why my yard? Pure luck as well as a welcoming habitat that birds like and need, clean feeders with a variety of seed, and a fresh water source for them to enjoy would all be contributing factors.

Truthfully, there are many mysteries surrounding the appearance of a Brambling in Bellevue, but that is part of the wonder of nature. It is an even bigger part of what keeps birders fascinated—this and the pure joy of sharing the wonder and gazing upon a beauty from across the planet!



Well, he is a birder-dog, too, right? Kathleen, Scout, and Bill Whitehead on point, so to speak.

Bellevue Brambling Factoids

- The bird was first seen on 4/8/06 and last seen on 4/16/06
- 45 visiting birders signed the Brambling guest book.



Brambling

Fringilla Montifringilla

L 6.25" ws 11" wt 0.74 oz (21g)

Habitat: Birch and coniferous woods, cultivated land.

Distribution: Europe and northern Asia.

Life and habits: The nest is built usually in a conifer (rarely in bushes) and is cup-shaped and made of moss, bark, lichens, wool, etc. The female builds it. The single annual clutch has 5-8 eggs, laid at intervals of a day and incubated solely by the female for 11 or 12 days. The nidicolous (The technical term for young birds that remain in the nest completely dependent on the parent birds for a period after hatching.) nestlings are reared by both parents and fly at 11-13 days. The food, which is obtained from the ground, consists mainly of seeds, berries and insects (particularly prominent in the diet of the chicks). In winter this species migrates southward and becomes gregarious, forming flocks of many thousands of individuals, which use collective nocturnal dormitories.

Sources: Simon & Schuster's Guide to Birds of the World, 1978, pg. 173.

The Birdwatcher's Companion to N. Am. Birdlife, 2004, Princeton University Press, pg. 567



Not nearly as exciting, but still newsworthy, a Lesser Goldfinch was spied on April 24th in my feeder. This finch is occasionally spotted north of the Snake River in Idaho, but it is more likely seen south of the Snake and is very common in CA, NV, UT, AZ, and NM.

As Spring Arrives a Photo Essay



A Sandhill Crane soaring at about 100 feet over Loving Creek near the Silver Creek Preserve.



You know that spring is in full gear when you find a brooding Great Horned Owl.



When a warm March breeze ruffled this Tufted Titmouse in Mahwah, N.J., Don King would have been jealous!



Ruffed Grouse, Island Park, Idaho.



A Red-winged Blackbird singing his spring song.



Rival male Cinnamon Teal engaged in a squabble over a female.



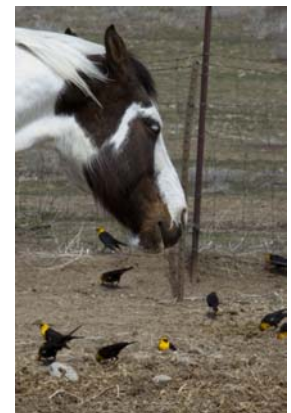
Three Hooded Mergansers on Henry's Fork of the Snake River peacefully floating along.



White-breasted nuthatch. Mahwah, N.J.



An American Pelican in fresh breeding plumage in Harri-man State Park, ID.



Yellow-headed Blackbirds with a horse.



Red-winged Blackbird under a footbridge at Silver Creek on 4/19/06.

All Photos were taken with a Nikon D70 Digital SLR by Kathleen Cameron and Copyrighted 2006.

Response to FAQ About the Brambling

Several people have asked me what it was like to have a rare bird visiting my feeders. Well, first of all, it was exhilarating to say the least! It was terribly exciting from the moment that I glanced out the window and it registered in my brain, "That bird doesn't belong here." From that moment through the next twenty-four hours I was charged with feverish energy; it was nearly all consuming. It made my hands shake as I pointed my telephoto lens at the bird below my feeder knowing that I HAD to get this shot for fear that no one would believe me without proof.

Once I had the proof, I ran to the phone, and adrenalin caused me to sound as if I had just run a marathon according to one of the first birders I contacted with the news of the Brambling. Then with the arrival of each new visiting birder and the recounting of the story, the energy would surge again and again. When each new seeker saw the bird, their burst of birder excitement got me going again!

By the dawning of the second day of the Brambling event, I was exhausted. I truly was pooped but totally happy to peer between the mini-blinds in the front room and see carloads of eager binocularized eyes trained on my front yard. Every morning for eight days this early morning scene awaited me at the crack of dawn.

As the days progressed and the Brambling kept showing up along with birders who also had traveled a good distance to Bellevue, Idaho, I started to feel somewhat responsible for whether or not they would see it. I knew that I was being irrational about this, as all seasoned birders know that there is no guarantee when it comes to chasing a rare bird. But still it was hard not to have some concerns about this. I especially felt this way when the Brambling's visits became less frequent and erratic, and folks had driven several hundred miles for a glimpse of the lovely black, orange, and white stray from Eurasia, but each and every person told me that they were simply happy for the chance to possibly see the bird and thanked me for sending out the alert.

In all, the entire experience was thrilling, and thought provoking, as well as being a zenith event in my birding pursuit, an eight day moment in which I was graced with the sight of this beautiful Brambling as well as with all the people who came to see it. I was in awe of being in the presence of this tiny phenomenon of nature, one little 0.74 ounce being that was on an unplanned adventure during his first spring migra-

tion, drawing the attention of dozens of interested observers who then paused in their busy lives to appreciate his presence, marvel at his endurance, and consider the mystery of this arrival so far from home.

Bird News From Around the Globe

May 13th is International Migratory Bird Day!
Visit: <http://www.birdday.org/> to learn more about this celebration and to find an event near you.

In Utah at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge just north of Brigham City, a two day celebration was held (April 21-22, 2006) as the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center was opened to the public. Bird identification workshops, optics presentations, wildlife photography seminars, environmental education, and tours of the facility were offered to participants. Presenters included; author Kenn Kaufmann, photographer Karen Hollingsworth, and sculptor Greg Woodard to name a few. Source: Box Elder News Journal

The 8th Annual Great Salt Lake Bird Festival is May 18-23, 2006. Visit www.greatsaltlakebirdfest.com or Email: tour@co.davis.ut.us

May 2, 2006 a housing development across 300 square miles of south-east England has been halted to protect three rare bird species; Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*), Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), and the Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*). Source; The Independent Online



Just east of Terreton, Idaho, hundreds of migrating Snow Geese fill the overcast sky.

Thank you so much for your continued support!

Good Birding To You!

The Brambling FAQ article is also available @ <http://www.cdaudubon.org/> in the newsletter section.