

Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) redux: a bit of Americana

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By virtue of wintering over in Colorado Springs and Pueblo in 1998-1999, the Lesser Goldfinch completed an historical circle. It was between the locations of the present-day cities that the species was first recorded in 1820.

The species owes the timing of its discovery to the activities of the Long Expedition of 1819-1820. Under orders to explore and define the western boundary of the lands of the Louisiana Purchase, the party spent much of the summer of 1820 in what is now Colorado. The party made a prolonged encampment a few miles south of Colorado Springs from 12 July through 16 July 1820. During this time, Thomas Say, the expedition entomologist, found and collected the first Lesser Goldfinch known to science. The name given to the black-backed race of the species, Arkansas Goldfinch, derives from the fact that the party had, only a few days prior to the discovery, crossed into the Arkansas River drainage.

The period of the Long Expedition's encampment south of Colorado Springs is better known to historians as the time that Dr. Edwin James, botanist, geologist, and surgeon for the Long Expedition, led the first recorded ascent of Pikes Peak. Two other expedition members accompanied Dr. James on his historic climb.

Paradoxically, the Say's Phoebe, which bears Mr. Say's name, also was discovered on the Long Expedition but not by Mr. Say. The phoebe was first recorded on 17 July 1820, one day after the lengthy encampment beneath the shadow of Pikes Peak. Posterity has treated Mr. Say most kindly, who was commemorated not only in the bird's standard English name but in its generic (*Sayornis*) and specific (*saya*) epithets as well. In contrast, the legacy of Dr. James is almost forgotten: only an obscure 13,300-foot peak in central Colorado bears the name of the first man to record a conquest of Pikes Peak. And in a last bit of historical irony, it was Pike himself who first saw the mountain and tried (unsuccessfully) to climb it in 1806. It was named for him later but before the Long Expedition (Pike was killed in the War of 1812).