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TYPE LOCALITY AND EARLY SPECIMENS OF THE MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE

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The type locality for the Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) has been somewhat confused in various editions of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) *Check-list of North American Birds*. Consideration of the local geography and environmental conditions at the time the type specimen was collected in 1841 reveals that the type locality can, in fact, be identified more clearly, but not unambiguously.

William Gambel's (1843) original statement, "This new and distinct species we first observed about a day's journey from Santa Fe, in New Mexico, and from thence in all the ranges of the Rocky Mountains nearly to California," was somewhat vague to begin with. In the first (1886) edition of the AOU checklist, Robert Ridgway quoted Gambel as to the locality but truncated that description after "New Mexico." This was maintained in the second edition (AOU 1895).

The third edition of the AOU checklist (1910) described the site of Gambel's initial observation as "about a day's journey west from Santa Fe." There was no citation or justification for the addition of "west." The fourth edition (1931) repeated this description. In the fifth (1957), sixth (1983), and seventh (1998) "west" appears in brackets.

Coming by way of the Santa Fe Trail, the 18-year-old William Gambel arrived in the Mexican provincial capital of Santa Fe on 2 July 1841. He remained in Santa Fe until 1 September 1841, collecting plant and animal specimens in the area. These dates are well established in the historical record of the caravans with which he traveled.

By 1841 the immediate vicinity of Santa Fe was largely denuded of piñon-juniper woodland because of firewood gathering and grazing. If he was looking for undisturbed habitat for new plants or animals, Gambel would not have found it close to town or in more settled locales farther to the north or southwest along the Camino Real.

Nuttall's (1848) specific descriptions of Gambel's plant collections reveal that while he was in Santa Fe, Gambel explored along the Rio Grande, which flows to the south-southwest about 32 km to the west of Santa Fe. The basalt-capped Caja del Rio Plateau and White Rock Canyon preclude easy access to the Rio Grande to the west of Santa Fe. However, he found Gambel's Oak (*Quercus gambelii*) "on the banks of the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande], but not abundant" and the Many-flowered Gilia (*Gilia multiflora*) in "sandy hills along the borders of the Rio del Norte." To the northwest of Santa Fe there are sandy hills along the Rio Grande, about 16 km by trail from Santa Fe, over hills close to town and down the Cañada Ancha to the Rio Grande. This area northwest of Santa Fe is undoubtedly the type locality for the plants and some of the reptiles described on the basis of Gambel's collections.

The areas of these collections, like many in the vicinity of Santa Fe, are vegetated with typical piñon-juniper savanna, and Gambel would have found the Mountain Chickadee there. If he had ascended into the higher mountains to the east of Santa Fe beyond the reach of firewood gatherers, he would have found it there also. Gambel clearly identified the locations along the Rio Grande for his botanical collections, but although he almost certainly observed the Mountain Chickadee in at least some of those areas, he made no mention of the Santa Fe vicinity in his description of the chickadee.

As wagon trains approached Santa Fe by way of the Santa Fe Trail, the final campsites prior to arrival in Santa Fe were near Glorieta in Santa Fe County (27 km southeast of Santa Fe) and near Pecos in San Miguel County (43 km southeast of Santa Fe), both about a day's journey *southeast* of Santa Fe. Prior to reaching

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this area, the Santa Fe Trail passed through open grasslands skirting any Mountain Chickadee habitat. However, either of these campsite locales is suitable habitat for the Mountain Chickadee—and in camp Gambel would have had time for ornithological observations. His wagon train stopped at one or both of these places on 30 June and/or 1 July 1841. Gambel's statement that the bird was found "from thence in all the ranges of the Rocky Mountains nearly to California," together with the bird's almost certain presence during his time in Santa Fe indicates that the bird was "first observed about a day's journey" prior to his arrival in Santa Fe along the Santa Fe Trail. Subsequent observations would therefore not be noteworthy. Apparently, Phillips (1986:86) also suspected Gambel collected the Mountain Chickadee before arriving at Santa Fe, as he gave the type locality as "ca. 1 day's journey (= 35–40 km SE?) from Santa Fe, New Mexico."

Gambel's specimen of the chickadee is apparently lost. Perhaps it did not survive the trip from Santa Fe, although a number of reptiles from the Santa Fe area—in ethanol, a popular fluid on the trail—did make it back. When Gambel returned to Philadelphia in 1845, John Cassin, curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP), wrote to his friend Spencer Baird, "Eureka! Gambel is here with his California birds and others—not very many, but some of the most magnificent specimens I ever saw" (Stone 1910). Indeed, eight of Gambel's holotype specimens, including that of Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), collected on the trail between New Mexico and California, remain at the Academy. Four of Gambel's holotype specimens, however, are in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (USNM).

The Smithsonian's original ornithological catalog, which is also the catalog of Baird's personal collection, notes only that the birds were collected by Gambel and came "from Wilson." From their position in the dated sequence, they were not cataloged until the fall of 1847, after the creation of the Smithsonian in 1846, and two years after Gambel returned from the West. Thomas Wilson, one of the trustees of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, was a great supporter of its ornithology department, buying a number of important European and Australian collections for it. It would appear that Wilson was also instrumental in the transfer of some of Gambel's specimens from Philadelphia to the Smithsonian.

The name Gambel (1843) gave to the Mountain Chickadee, *Parus montanus*, was preoccupied by *Parus montanus* Conrad von Baldenstein, 1827, the earliest name for the Willow Tit of Eurasia, currently classified as *Poecile montanus*. Robert Ridgway (in AOU 1886) introduced *Parus gambeli* as a substitute.

The earliest Mountain Chickadee in the Smithsonian collection (USNM 5643) was collected in Wyoming by W. S. Wood in 1856, and the earliest New Mexico specimen (USNM 37062) was collected by Elliot Coues in 1864. Probably the earliest extant specimen, dated 17 or 18 September 1845, is in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP 9329), but its collector and location are not identified. The history of the dispersal of Gambel's collections between the two museums may contain clues to the disappearance of the holotype of the Mountain Chickadee.

The evidence suggests that Gambel based his description of the Mountain Chickadee on observations made shortly before he arrived in Santa Fe, probably southeast of the city on the Santa Fe Trail. However, since Gambel could have found the chickadee almost anywhere in the vicinity of Santa Fe, and in the absence of a holotype that might indicate a more precise location, the type locality should rest in Gambel's words: "about a day's journey from Santa Fe in New Mexico."

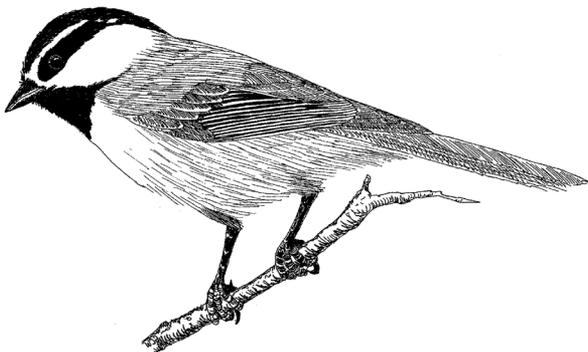
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Mountain Chickadee

Sketch by George C. West