Recently, I was sent a photo (above) of a junco to identify. It was a Cassiar Junco (Junco hyemalis cismontanus), which is a controversial subspecies of the Dark-eyed Junco breeding in the northern Rocky Mountains. It is named after the Cassiar Mountains in northern British Columbia and southern Yukon. Cassiar is an intermediate (intergrade or hybrid) population that originated from interbreeding between Slate-colored (J. h. hyemalis) and Oregon Juncos (J. h. montanus) (Miller 1941). Cassiar-like juncos also result if a stray Oregon Junco in the East mates with a Slate-colored Junco. The Cassiar Junco is the Kumlien’s Gull of juncos, which is also a large intermediate (hybrid) and variable population. Cassiar and Kumlien’s are convenient names for birders.

Like Oregon Juncos, a few Cassiars wander east occasionally to Ontario (James 1991). Many Cassiar Juncos, particularly males, are identifiable with a high degree of certainty. Adult males have (1) a convex hood (turns up at sides) suggesting Oregon Junco, but with grey sides similar to Slate-colored Junco, and (2) a more blackish hood than Slate-colored’s contrasting (usually shows neck line) with the back, which is often brownish. Female Cassiars show a paler hood frequently cut off from the sides, which are more mixed with pinkish brown than in most Slate-coloreds. Oregon Juncos almost never show grey on the sides. On Slate-colored Juncos the lower edge of the hood is concave turning onto the sides. Many puzzling juncos are best left unidentified. Most of the above is from Miller (1941).


For more information about how you can start up a CBC 4 Kids event in your area:
Please contact Jody Allair (jallair@birdscanada.org) or Liza Barney (lbarney@birdscanada.org).
To learn more about Bird Studies Canada’s Bird Science and Environmental Education Program, visit www.birdscanada.org/longpoint/education

First year male Cassiar Junco (J. h. cismontanus) on 8 January 2011 at the Hendrie Valley in Burlington, Ontario. Aged as a first year bird in formative plumage by juvenal tertials broadly edged with cinnamon and brownish juvenal primary coverts contrasting with fresher and greyer formative greater coverts. Photo by Malcolm Benn

Acknowledgements
I thank Malcolm Benn for use of his photo. Wayne Weber provided information about the origin of the name Cassiar Junco. Seabrooke Leckie contacted Peter Pyle who confirmed the junco’s age and plumage. Jean Iron made suggestions and proofed this note.

For more information about Cassiar Junco.
www.oceanwanderers.com/JuncoID.html
Junco subspecies in Ontario.
www.jeaniron.ca/2010/darkeyedjunkoRF.pdf

First year male Cassiar Junco (J. h. cismontanus) on 8 January 2011 at the Hendrie Valley in Burlington, Ontario. Aged as a first year bird in formative plumage by juvenal tertials broadly edged with cinnamon and brownish juvenal primary coverts contrasting with fresher and greyer formative greater coverts. 

Photo by Malcolm Benn