

Observer: Will Fields

Species: Black-billed Magpie      Number: 1

Location: Broken Kettle Grasslands (a Nature Conservancy Preserve, Plymouth Co., IA)

Date & Time: October 9, 1999, about 9:45 a.m.

Others with you: members of the Iowa State University Fisheries and Wildlife Biology Club

Describe the bird: The bird's body was roughly the same size as a crow. It was first seen perched in a tree where I could see a white patch in its wing and a lightly colored belly. When it flew it was apparent that it had a long tail, and white patches in the wings and body were also visible.



Similar species and how eliminated: The American crow and the common raven lack do not have such a long tail and they usually do not have white in their plumage. I had seen American crows flying around the preserve earlier that morning. This bird definitely had a longer tail than the American crows. Ring-necked pheasants also have a long tail, but they do not normally have a black and white plumage.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? None of the other people with me is very familiar with identifying birds in the field.

Viewing conditions: I was about 80 to 100 meters from the tree where the bird was perched and I saw it with my own eyes. I did not have a pair of binoculars with me at the time.

Previous experience: I have seen black-billed magpies before when driving through the Rocky Mountains. This summer I became familiar with ring-necked pheasants while doing fieldwork, and I have long been familiar with distinguishing crows from other birds in the field.

References & persons consulted before writing description: I talked with Dr. Dinsmore prior to my trip and he said that it was possible that a black-billed magpie might be around that part of the state since there was once a nest of this species found near that area. About 5 minutes after seeing the bird in the field I checked with a National Geographic Society field guide and it appeared that the bird fit the description of a black-billed magpie best.

How long before field notes made? I did not make notes in the field while I was watching the bird. When I returned home that evening I wrote down what I had seen that day. It was probably about 7 hours after I saw the bird in the field.