

Marbled Godwit

17 May 1983

Cherokee, Cherokee Co., IA

*Marion Brewer

largest number ever reported; IBL 53:50; 54:39

Record Number: 83-23

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Marion Brewer

LETTER

Bruce Peterjohn, 21 June 1983 (included with review)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 53:50

Records Committee: IBL 54:39

VOTE: 1-III, 2-IV, 2-V, 2-VI

IV, could be right but description doesn't eliminate Hudsonian Godwit.

VI, Large flock of Marbled Godwits very unlikely. Nothing in description eliminates Hudsonian.

III, Description weak, birds should have been flushed.

IV, Need more and better documentation.

V, Does not eliminate Hudsonian. Numbers incredible for Marbled Godwit. Date also too late for Marbled.

V, I would be much happier if a description of tail or wing pattern was included. Often Hudsonian Godwits in two different plumages can be found in one area together, seeming like 2 different species. These may be Marbled, but key field marks are omitted.

83-23
105-K E. Ticonderoga Dr.
Westerville, OH 43081
21 June 1983

Dear Tom:

I'm looking forward to the I.O.U. meeting in October. I'll let you know about my travel plans and provide you with some slides at a later date.

My thoughts on the documentations are as follows:

Mississippi Kite: definitely a Northern Harrier

Black-legged Kittiwake: definitely a first-year Ring-billed Gull!
The absence of head and nape markings, bill color and tail shape eliminate the possibility of a kittiwake.

Laughing Gull: the description does not eliminate a sub-adult Franklin's Gull (which would have a similar wing pattern with no white separating the gray mantle from the black primaries.) Since she did not describe bill and leg color or the black hood in detail, I cannot accurately age this bird (and hence cannot identify it to species). Given its location in extreme western Iowa, I would imagine that a Franklin's would be much more likely.

Black-headed Grosbeak: another problematical grosbeak sighting that does not sit very well with me. The description of the underparts is suggestive of a Black-head but is not detailed enough to be conclusive (the observer should have mentioned the belly and described the streaking pattern in more detail). The white eye line is suggestive of a Rose-breast. In addition, the observer was not familiar with the species and appeared rather indecisive with her own identification. Given these facts, I don't think this written description provides a conclusive basis for identifying this bird to either species.

Whooping Crane: I have a number of problems with this sighting. First, the fact the observer was a non-birder who observed the bird at a distance of 100 yards without binoculars makes me wonder about the accuracy of the description (could he accurately determine bill and leg color at that distance?). Secondly, the crane he described was a first-year bird that should still be accompanying its parents (by the way there were only 2 or 3 young produced last year out of the 70 or so cranes in the Aransas flock). Thirdly, it is rather unlikely that this species would be feeding along the shore of a man-made lake. Lastly, I invariably receive 1 or 2 Whooping Crane reports from somewhere in the Region each year (I also received 1 from Indiana this spring). These reports always come from casual or non-birders in very unlikely locations. While it is conceivable that an occasional crane might stray into extreme western Iowa or Missouri, such a sighting must be thoroughly described by a number of active birders (and hopefully accompanied by photos) before I will accept it.

Western Grebe: the description is pretty good for a light-phase bird. The best field mark is the head pattern which he described perfectly (white lores and white extending above the eye). The bill color is a little troublesome; light-phased grebes have orange-yellow bills while dark-phase birds have greenish-yellow bills. However, the description of a "bright yellow" bill is closer to a light-phase bird. Another characteristic that is frequently useful is back color. Light-phase birds have a grayish back that is lighter than the nape (as was accurately described for this bird); dark-phase grebes have uniformly black upperparts and nape. The best article describing these color phases is found in Western Birds (1981, Vol. 12 (1), pp. 41-46); I can send you a copy if you're interested.

Eastern Wood Pewee: very marginal description (so marginal that I probably won't include it in my report). I have problems with any pewee described as a black and white bird (the upperparts certainly aren't black and the underparts aren't uniformly white). In addition, Empidonax flycatchers frequently lack eye rings. Given this brief and inaccurate description and the observers apparent inexperience, I would have to describe this sighting as questionable at best.

Gray-cheeked Thrush: another questionable sighting. The rusty tail of a Hermit can be rather difficult to view (especially for young birds in poor light). They also failed to mention the gray cheek patch. Given their inexperience, this sighting would best be treated as Catharus sp.

Several miscellaneous comments on some observations:

Yellow Rails: while the descriptions seem to come out of a field guide, from my experience, Yellow Rails look nothing like those pictured in the books. For example, they are not yellow at all but have cream-colored underparts and tan or buffy upperparts with rather indistinct dark streaks. If Iowa observers are seeing yellow-colored rails, I do not know what they are looking at.

Long-billed Dowitcher: basic plumaged long-bills cannot be identified by bill length and wing covert edgings!!!! I would suggest Mike Newlon read Pitelka's excellent monograph on the genus Limnodromus (1948, U. California Publ. Zool. 50: 1-108). before he attempts further identifications of dowitchers. While fall juveniles and breeding plumaged adults can be safely identified with caution (don't use the misinformation in the field guides), winter plumaged birds in migration cause real problems. I don't know of any proven field identification techniques for these dowitchers. (This letter is too long already, I will defer further discussion until October). Many birders are having similar problems. This spring, one state in the Region reported more long-bills than short-bills which is preposterous.

Godwits: I totally agree with your comment on godwit identification. Any May sighting of 46 godwits in this Region must certainly be Hudsonians.

can call notes

Tom Kent
June 21, 1983
page 3

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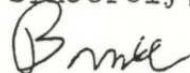
I have several requests:

1. Can you send me a better copy (or the original) of the Chestnut-collared Longspur documentation? I can't read the copy you sent me.
2. Can you send me a photo of the Vermilion Flycatcher? While a Vermilion Flycatcher should be unmistakable, there was a partially melanistic Scarlet Tanager in New York this spring that had a plumage pattern identical to a Vermilion Flycatcher (and was originally identified as one until someone familiar with both species saw the bird).

I will return both the photo and original ^{longspur documentation} promptly. I will feel more comfortable including both sightings in my spring report if I can study the available evidence in better detail.

I hope this information is useful to you. (I also hope it makes sense; it is getting quite late and I should have gone to bed long ago). Let me know if I can provide further assistance.

Sincerely,



Bruce Peterjohn

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

83-23

by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: MARBLED GODWIT
DATE SEEN: 17 May 1983
SITE OF OBSERVATION: Cherokee County
OBSERVERS: Marion Brewer
DATE OF REVIEW: 1983
METHOD OF REVIEW: Mailing to Committee
CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: VI

COMMENTS: While occurrence of Marbled Godwit at this time and in this part of Iowa is not unlikely, the number reported was extremely high. This required the Committee to examine the details provided closely to try to confirm the identification as Marbled Godwit. Unfortunately diagnostic field marks were not reported, such as the cinnamon wing linings (easy to see in flight) and the even-colored rump (also very easy to see in flight, and very different from the white rump-patch of Hudsonian Godwit). In spring, when Hudsonians (by far the more common of the two in western Iowa in spring) are migrating in Iowa, many are in partial breeding plumage, which can appear like the brownish plumage of Marbled Godwit. In many cases, it is necessary to flush Godwits in order to identify them. Finally, the Committee noted that most Marbled Godwits migrate through Iowa in spring in April, rather than May, the latter being the peak time for Hudsonians.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Brewer
83-23 VI

1. Species Marbled Godwit 2. Number 46
3. Location Cherokee Airport
4. Date: 5-17-83 5. Time Bird Seen: 7:45 PM to 8:10 PM
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Large sandpiper type bird with long slightly upturned bill, dark legs. Banded belly. Belly light brown with back darker brown

7. Description of voice, if heard: None
8. Description of behavior: Feeding
9. Habitat - general: flooded corn field
specific: Waters Edge
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:
~~Hudsonian~~ ~~Richardsonian~~
Hudsonian which was also in the field
11. Distance (how measured)? 50 yds Estimated 12. Optical equipment: 15x45 Spotting scope
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Cloudy - Light Rain
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: 4 of the last 8 years
15. Other observers: Dick Bierman
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Dick Bierman
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Peterson + Golden Field guides
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
Signature: 2 Day's Monica Brewer Address: RR#
Date: 5-17-83 City, State: Cherokee, Ia