

Western Tanager

26 Apr 1980

Forney Lake, Fremont Co., IA

\*Myers, \*Silcock

Myers 1980, IBL 50:44, 51, 52:41

Record Number: 80-16  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

W. Ross Silcock

Robert K. Myers

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 50:44, 51

Myers, B. 1980. Western Tanager in southwest Iowa. IBL 50:53.

Records Committee: IBL 52:41

VOTE: 1-II, 6-III

Yes, Adequate description for easily identified bird.

Yes, unmistakable.

Yes, Easy bird to I.D., likely loc. and date.

at Iowa City (TK).  
Lapland Longspur: 25 were in Hamilton Co. on 6 Mar. (HZ, LZ), no others reported.  
+ documented

## CONTRIBUTORS

Carl Bendorf, Iowa City; Dick Bierman, Cherokee; Gladys Black, Pleasantville; Tanya Bray, Omaha NE; Marion Brewer, Cherokee; Dorothy A. Brunner, Nora Springs; George Crossley, Dubuque; Raymond Cummins, Pocahontas; Rich DeCoster, Iowa City; Genevieve DeLong, Lamoni; James Dinsmore, Ames; Tim Gates, Cedar Rapids; Ione Getscher, Hamburg; J. Donald Gillaspey, Lamoni; Marlyn Glasson, Iowa City; Douglas Harr, Larchwood; Rick Hollis, Iowa City; Wallace E. Jardine; Pocahontas; Glenn E. Jones, Rockwell City; Eric G. Joranson; Council Bluffs; Thomas Kent, Iowa City; Darwin Koenig, Montezuma; Kurt Maas, Ames; Randy Maas, Ames; Tomma Maas, Ames; Paul Martsching, Ames; Francis I. Moore, Waterloo; Dean Mosman, Elkhart; Jack & Mary Musgrove, Des Moines; Robert K. Myers, Waterloo; Curt Nelson, Mason City; David A. Newhouse, Boone; Michael Newlon, Iowa City; Peter Petersen, Davenport; John Robinson, Ames; Michael Roughton, Ames; Joe Schaufenbuel, St. Lucas; Thomas Shires, Iowa City; Ross Silcock, Malvern; Thomas Staudt, Iowa City; Tom Stone Jr., Waterloo; Alex Thiermann, Ames; Robert Thornburg, Pleasantville; John Van Dyk, Sioux Center; Barbara Wilson, Hastings; Hank Zaletel, Ames; Linda Zaletel, Ames.

## OTHER OBSERVERS

Paul Bartelt (DN); Don Bray (TB); Steve Bray (TB); Judy Carlson (RC); Bruce Ehresman (DN); Don Grave (PP); Doc Harms (RC); Russell Hays (TSJr,FM); Allan Hahn (PP); Joan Higley (GC); Thaine Hopkins (RC); ISU Students (JD); Sandra Kovanda (TB); Craig Lauritsen (DN); Babs Padelford (TB); Mary Lou Petersen (PP); Carl Priebe (DN); Mr. and Mrs. Herbert M. Prince (GB); B. J. Rose (RS, BWi); Clark Scott (PP); Ron Spengler (DH); Tom Stone (TSJr); Walter Zuurdeeg (PP).

## COMMENTS

Forty-four reports were received before the cutoff date of June 7 comprising 146 pages including 36 documentations. Most areas of the state were well covered, but there was practically no coverage of extreme s.e. and s. central Iowa including Red Rock and Rathbun Reservoirs. About one-third of the reports were brief including only a few species; the others were moderate to extensive. Many of the reporters were new with some providing extensive new coverage. David Newhouse provided a new avenue for input from Conservation Commission personnel. Two established Iowa birders were heard from for the first time in several years. Keep up the good work.

Most contributors were cognizant of the problems in substantiating rare and difficult-to-identify species. I am gradually developing a philosophy toward handling these problems. As I see it, my job is to include in the field reports observations that are significant and beyond reasonable doubt. Let me first discuss what constitutes "beyond reasonable doubt." There is no reason to question species which are common, in season, easy to identify and seen by experienced, conservative observers known to me. Not surprisingly, some of the most significant sightings fall at the opposite end of the spectrum. Evidence which must be considered, more or less in the order of reliability, is: (1) Specimen or diagnostic photograph. In this report photographs of a Ruddy Turnstone in February and of a Mountain Bluebird were the convincing evidence. (2) A netted or injured bird examined by a competent observer. (3) Independent description of

a bird by more than one observer including key field marks. If the birders see the same bird without knowing that the other has seen it and make notes immediately they have not biased each other nor been biased by a book. More frequently, two or more observers look at a bird together, a situation in which group psychology is likely to come into play. The observers should avoid expressing conclusions but remind each other of field marks to look for and consult books only if the bird is still in view. Immediately upon completion of observation and before discussing the identification, each person should write down a description of the bird. The separate documentations, in spite of their crudeness, are likely to be more convincing than a composite documentation written hours or days later. (4) Verification of a bird found by one individual that can be found by other birders he/she has notified. (5) A bird seen by one individual in which the key field marks are discussed, whether present or absent, and documented objectively. (6) Observations by birders known to be experienced, competent and conservative. (7) A less well documented bird that is observed in other locations during the time period. These guidelines are helpful for accidental, casual and rare, regular species which are difficult to identify. Handling of more common, difficult-to-identify species such as Dowitchers and Common Terns is a problem we need to address in the future.

How should I handle the reporting of birds that are not "beyond reasonable doubt"? Here are my current feelings. Single sightings of accidental and difficult-to-identify casual species will not be included in the Field Reports without convincing documentation. I will request documentation from regular contributors who do not consistently fail to provide it. The same procedure will be applied to some of the rare regular species. I hope to develop a list of regular species that need to be documented. Ray Cummins and Barb Wilson have sent their suggestions. I hope you will too. Full documentation is not always needed; for example, mention of key field marks for Marbled Godwits, Dowitchers, Northern Shrike and Bohemian Waxwing would convince me of the quality of the observation.

I will make only a few comments on what is significant to report. I judge that most contributors are including almost all of the unusual sightings. Some doubtful ones should be left out. Major contributors represent a spectrum when it comes to reporting more common species ranging from none to all. I would appreciate your leaving out common species present in normal numbers at normal times. I hope that we can develop some means to handle moderately common species such as Common Loon, Great Egret and Stilt Sandpiper and selected Blue List species such as Eastern Bluebird and Loggerhead Shrike.

One final thought: Encourage those birding with you to join the IOU.

## GENERAL NOTES

**Western Tanager in Southwest Iowa** - On April 26, 1980 I was birding with Ross Silcock in Fremont County Iowa. At 11:00 a.m. we were at Forney's Lake checking a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers when I noticed a quite different bird. By the time I could get the words "Western Tanager" out of my mouth, Ross was at my side and confirmed the identification. Ross has seen the bird in its normal range. The Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) was a male in full breeding plumage. The bird was clearly visible in excellent light. The bright yellow body, black wings and tail, white wing bars, and the brilliant orange-red head were easily seen. We watched the bird for several minutes before it moved off out of sight. BOB MYERS, 1236 Sylvia Ave., Waterloo, Iowa 50701



BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

accepted  
9/20/80  
6/01

1. Species WESTERN Tanager 2. Number: (1)

3. Location FORNEY LAKE, FREMONT Co., IOWA

4. Date: ~~MAY~~ APR 26, 1980 5. Time Bird seen: about 10 am to for 2-3 minute

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):

YELLOW UNDERPARTS, WHITE WINGBARS AND RED HEAD CLEARLY SEEN.

7. Description of voice, if heard: NOT HEARD.

8. Description of behavior: FEEDING IN BUDDING COTTONWOODS WITH FLOCK OF YELLOW-RUMPED ~~W~~ WARBLES (MOSTLY MALES, MANY SINGING).

9. Habitat - general: COTTONWOOD BELT NEAR FORNEY LAKE - RIPARIAN ISLAND IN MISSOURI  
specific: RIVER BOTTOM FARMLAND.

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

YELLOWTHROATED VIREO - RED HEAD, BILL NOT "HOOKED", MORE ACTIVE  
NORTHERN ORIOLE (1<sup>ST</sup> YR MALE) - YELLOW COLORATION CONTRASTING WITH RED HEAD.

11. Distance (how measured)? [RATHER DISTINCTIVE SPECIES]

12. Optical equipment:

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): 40 FEET (ESTIMATED)

7X50 BUSHNELL BINOCULARS

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: P. CLOUDY, SUNNY; LIGHT EXCELLENT  
SEEN IN COLORADO (TWICE).

15. Other observers: ROBERT MYERS.

16. Did the others agree with your identification? YES.

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: ~~YES~~ NONE.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: NONE.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? ABOUT A MONTH.

Bob Myers  
Signature

Address: Roll Mallen

BOB MYERS WAS GOING TO DOCUMENT THIS BIRD (AND MAY STILL) BUT JUST IN CASE, THIS IS SUBMITTED.

Date: 5/31/80

City, State: Iowa  
51551

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

accepted  
9/20/80  
6/01/

Species Western Tanager (Piranga ludoviciana) 2. Number: 1 ♂

3. Location Forney's Lake - Fremont County Iowa

4. Date: April 26, 1980 5. Time Bird seen: 11:00 A.M. to 11:05 A.M.

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):

Size - some larger than the yellow-rump warblers near it but smaller than red-wing blackbirds also present

Shape - sleek "tanager" shape with tanager bill (large thick bill)

Color-pattern - 1) Bright yellow body

2) Black wings + tail + back

3) White wing bars

4) Brilliant orange-red head

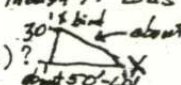
7. Description of voice, if heard: NOT Heard

8. Description of behavior: Bird was moving through a row of cottenwood trees about 30' off the ground

9. Habitat - general: south edge of Forney's Lake  
specific: row of cottenwood trees

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

Nothing really looks like the male western tanager. The yellow throated vireo has the yellow and wing bars but little else. Some orioles have back wings and wing bars but no bright yellow body or orange head. Identification was easy even though it was a first of the species for me.

11. Distance (how measured)?  about 65-70' from bird

12. Optical equipment:

1 pr. 7x35 B+L binoculars + 1 pr. 7x35 Bushnell

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

partly cloudy day but sun was out then - sun was at our backs - excellent lighting

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

This was a life bird for me but Ross Sikock, Malvern, Iowa has seen it out west

15. Other observers:

Ross Sikock, Malvern, Iowa

16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes - he confirmed it

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: only Ross + I were there

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

I had Chandler S. Robbins' book Birds of North America with me and we immediately compared the bird to the description.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 days

Robert K. Myers

Address: 1236 Sylvia Ave.

☐ nature

Date: April 29, 1980

City, State: Waterloo, Iowa 50701