

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 10/18/94

Mountain Bluebird
17 Mar 1992
s. of Ames, Story Co., IA
Matthew Patterson
IBL 63:70, Patterson 1993

Record Number: 92-07
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Matthew Patterson, Dept. of Animal Ecology, Iowa State
University, Ames, IA 50011 (6/30/92)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: none

Records Committee: IBL 63:70

Patterson, M. 1993. Mountain Bluebird in Story County. IBL
63:102.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Pale blue breast fading to white eliminates Eastern
Bluebird.

A-D, No other bluebird has a characteristic bright blue back
and a light blue breast with whitish undertail coverts/vent area.

A-D, Sufficient details provided for a male Mountain Bluebird.

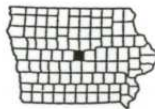
- Robbins, M. B., and D. A. Easterla. 1992. *Birds of Missouri*. Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia, MO. 399 pp.
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- South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. 1991. *The birds of South Dakota*, 2nd ed. Aberdeen, SD. 411 pp.
- Van Dyk, J. 1983. Vermilion Flycatcher in north-west Iowa. *Iowa Bird Life* 53:58-59.

810 North B. St., Indianola, IA

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD IN STORY COUNTY

MATTHEW PATTERSON

On 17 March 1992, I was walking through a pasture/woods complex just south of Ames hoping to identify some early spring migrants. I came across a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds moving and foraging ahead of me. Being the first Eastern Bluebirds of the season for me, I stopped for a look.



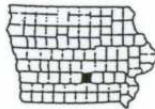
To my surprise, my eyes fell on one solid blue bird with white underparts within the larger group. Knowing immediately that I was looking at a Mountain Bluebird, I began to make note of its behavior and field marks. The bird was perched 4 to 5 feet above the ground. It allowed a close approach of 15 feet while it repeatedly dropped to the ground to feed. Its blue color was lighter and more brilliant than its eastern relative. The breast was a paler blue that faded to a white belly. This bird's legs stood more erect and its body more horizontal than the Eastern Bluebirds. I watched the bird for 20 minutes and then left to get a camera. I returned a few hours later and on the next day, but was unable to relocate the bird. This is the seventh accepted record of Mountain Bluebirds in Iowa and the first for Story County. The mid-March date, about the time that migrant Eastern Bluebirds start to arrive in Iowa, fits the pattern of several of the previous Mountain Bluebird records from Iowa (see Steffens and Johnson, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:119-120, 1961).

Department of Animal Ecology, Iowa State Univ., Ames, IA 50011

THREE LOON SPECIES AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

JIM FULLER

During the I.O.U. field trip to Red Rock Reservoir on 7 November 1992, a Red-throated Loon was discovered near the marina boat ramp of the West Wallashuck Recreation Area in Marion County. Almost immediately after setting up my scope early the next morning, I found what I identified as the Red-throated Loon only about 200 yards to the east. There were also a number of Common Loons in the area, sometimes with one or more in the same scope field. Pam and Reid Allen arrived shortly after I found the bird, and as Reid was watching it in his scope, he exclaimed that another loon had flown in and landed very close to the Red-throated Loon, and it was not a Common Loon. It was a Pacific Loon. By this time the birds were 300 yards off and drifting farther



away, but we obtained good looks of these two birds together, as well as with Common Loons.

The Red-throated Loon was smaller than the nearby Common Loons, estimated 75 percent of their size. The neck was also noticeably thinner. The throat and front of the neck were white, and there was a definite difference between that white and the gray of the back of the neck and top of the head. The demarcation was pretty much straight up-and-down, as compared to the patterned (white indented) side of the neck of the Common Loon. In addition, the dark portion of the head and neck of the Common Loon was a darker gray than the Red-throated. The bill of the Red-throated was noticeably thinner than that of the Common Loon, and it appeared to be tilted up. When the Red-throated was closest, some white speckling could be seen on the back.

The Pacific Loon appeared to be about the same size as the Red-throated, lacked a patterned neck, but had a very definite demarcation (even more so than the Red-throated) between the white of the foreneck and the dark of the hindneck. The color of the top of the head and face, back of the neck, and back/wings was a gray-brown, compared to the almost black of the Common Loon. The white of the chin, foreneck, and breast was much less extensive than on the Common Loons. The dark area of the face included the eye, and dropped straight down the neck to the bend of the wing. The Pacific Loon also had a smaller bill than the Common Loons, but it was straight, compared to the upturned bill of the Red-throated.

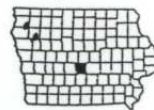
The next day, 9 November, Tom Kent relocated all the loons at the same site and observed a faint chin strap on the Pacific Loon when that bird was as close as 100 yards. To be able to see and compare three species of loons together, two of which are casual in Iowa, is most unusual.

6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

A GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL IN POLK COUNTY IN SPRING

JIM SINCLAIR

At 11:30 a.m. on 7 March 1992, from the parking lot of Sandpiper Beach at Saylorville Lake in Polk County I noticed a flock of approximately 60 gulls loafing on a sand spit just beyond the beach. Amongst the Ring-billed and Herring gulls was one gull which stood out because of its large size. I approached from the northeast to within 200 yards at which point the gull in question took wing. The bird proceeded up the lake shore passing me at approximately 100 yards at eye level. This allowed me a good look under excellent viewing conditions with 10 x 42 binoculars.



The gull was very large, dwarfing even the Herring Gulls with which it had been standing. The bill, which was all black and massive, was a prominent enough feature as to draw immediate attention. The head and neck were pale and without noticeable pattern. On the other hand, the back and upper wing were a strongly contrasting black and white pattern. As the bird proceeded upstream, dark secondary stripes were visible along with a pale rump and a dark tail band. The above features indicated to me that the bird was a first-year Great Black-backed Gull.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

92-07

What species? Mountain Bluebird How many? 1Location? South Ames- one quarter mile south of highway 30Type of habitat? Riparian woodland with frequent openingsWhen? date(s): 3/17/92 time: 2:00 to 2:30 PMWho? your name and address: Matthew Patterson Dept. of Animal Ecology ISUothers with you: I was alone

others before or after you: _____

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

While observing a small group of Eastern Bluebirds, one bird stood out as having no brownish/buff on the breast. The bird was the same size as the Eastern Bluebird with a black eye and bill. The birds' back color was brighter blue than the others and its breast was a light blue that faded to a white underside/vent. The primaries were black tipped. This bird's posture was also noticeably different from the three other bluebirds nearby. Its legs were more erect, supporting a more horizontal profile than the Eastern Bluebirds. During the 20+ minutes that I observed this bird, it was flitting from branch to ground to branch as it fed. There is no doubt in my mind regarding this sighting. I returned on the 18th to attempt to locate and photograph. I was unable to locate the bird.

Similar species and how eliminated: Breast color and body posture easily differentiated the Mountain from the Eastern Bluebird.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Partly cloudy with good light. I was able to get 15 feet from this bird and observe it for about 20 minutes. As it flew away frequently,

I was able to follow and reestablish distance. Nikon 7x35 binocs. Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Well "versed" in Passerine identification.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Dr. James Dinsmore, ISU
How long before field notes made? 1 hour this form completed? 3/19

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