

Townsend's Warbler
12 May 1988
Wildcat Den S.P., Muscatine Co., IA
*Gerald White
IBL 58:83, 59:77, White 1989

Record Number: 88-07
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Gerald White

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 58:83
Records Committee: IBL 59:77
White, G. 1989. Townsend's Warbler in Muscatine County. IBL 59:62-63.

VOTE: 5 A-D, 1 NA

NA. Plus: The description is perfect for Townsend's Warbler. The timing is also good for a vagrant. Minus: Notes not taken until "evening" after 45 second observation at 7:20 AM. One field guide was consulted immediately after observation and at least three others studied that evening, although it's not clear whether this was done before, during, or after the description was written. Observer also consulted with Pete Petersen and documentation only made apparently after Petersen agreed that bird was probably a Townsend's. From my own experience (unfortunately), I know what a powerful suggestive effect these kinds of things can have on one's recollection and subsequent written description. On balance, it is quite possible that a Townsend's Warbler was seen. Unfortunately, the circumstances of the documentation pose a problem for acceptance as the second state record.

A-D. Good description, despite brief look.

A-D. The observer is a moderately active birder and presents a very realistic sounding description of his observations. Unfortunately, however, notes were made many hours after the observation and after consulting field guides. Other observers were not notified to verify the sighting. The observer seems to be unaware that unusual birds should always be documented. Make notes now--think about what to do with them later. Nevertheless, the description is that of a male Townsend's Warbler. The facial pattern is most convincing to me. The other features all fit and suggest an exceeding good view and good recollection or perhaps some influence upon looking at field guides.

A-D. Extremely thorough documentation which pretty much limits the choice of species to Townsend's Warbler unless this could be a darker than normal Black-throated Green (of which there might be such an individual out there somewhere). Subtle black spots forming a faint streaked appearance above almost draws you away from accepting this record outright but by taking all other parts of the description together I have ruled out any other similar species at this time. It would have been nice to have had a description of the breast and side area but I think we have enough to make a decision on this one.

A-D. Description is accurate, given basically rear view, but eliminates satisfactorily other possibilities. Most bothersome

possibility is Black-throated Green (due to rear view) but black face-patch, well-seen, appears to eliminate this species.

REVOTE: 6-A-D, 1-NA

A-D. I will agree to put aside my reservations about the documentation process on this bird and vote to accept the record.

A-D. The view of black back spots indicates he saw the bird well, and was able to study it during his observation. The hint of yellow on the flank indicates a yellow lower breast was present, blackness of cheek patch, and black spots on the olive back eliminate all other black-throated warblers w/ white wing bars (Black-throated Green, Lawrence's hybrid, Golden-cheeked, and Hermit).

A-D. Very thorough description of male Townsend'd Warbler. The facial pattern, black bib, yellow belly with dark streaks on sides, and prominent white wing bars are sufficient to eliminate Black-thr. Green Warbler. Although no notes were taken immediately after sighting, the thorough description and decent viewing conditions make the record acceptable.

A-D. The only objection is based on circumstances of documentation. I agree that the technique was poor, however, I would judge that the description is accurate. It's too bad to have to make this value judgement. It would be much better if notes had been taken immediately and more people had seen the bird.

A-D. Documentation adequately describes Townsend's Warbler and also adequately eliminates other species. Field guide consultation might have had effect but I think that the observer did describe what he saw in good detail.

A-D. The NA comments were merely "nit-picking" and provide no solid problem with the doc.

NA (This is a change). I was looking for a good reason to doubt this record, and the NA here does that. The NA is a convincing summary of the reasons why such a record can be doubtful, even though sounding convincing. I overlooked these circumstances in my original analysis (Thus leaving myself wide open to justifiable criticism in the case of the Semipalmated Sdp.).

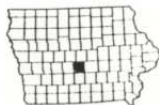
SENT TO: Gerald White 1505 E. 5th St., Muscatine, IA 52761

LITERATURE CITED

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Bartsch, P. 1922. An inland record of the Man-o'-war-bird. Auk 39:249-250.
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DuMont, P. A. 1933. A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa. Iowa City: University of Iowa Studies in Natural History, Vol. 15, No. 5.
Harrison, P. 1983. Seabirds an Identification Guide. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Hodges, J. 1949. Notes on the bird life in the Mississippi Valley. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 56:343-345.
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SABINE'S GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE



At 4:05 p.m. on 20 October 1988, I noticed a small, brown-mantled gull resting with other gulls on a large mud bar north of the Jester Park area of Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co. Initially, the bird looked like a small, first-winter Franklin's Gull; however, after studying the bird for several minutes, I concluded that the bird must be a juvenile Sabine's Gull. Bob Myers joined me at about 5:15 p.m., and we watched the bird until 5:50 p.m.

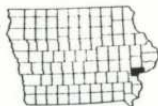
The bird remained resting on the mud bar until about 4:25 p.m., when it flew. In flight, the striking wing pattern was obvious. The outer primaries were black, forming a triangle from the bend of the wing outward. The inner wing, out to a line from the bend of the wing to the tip of the inner most secondary, was brown. The rest of the wing was white. In flight, the tail was slightly forked and was white except for a black terminal band. When perched, the upperparts, crown, and nape were light brown. The wings were darker than the rest of the upperparts. The underparts and forehead were white. The legs were black. The bill was also black and was shorter and thicker than the bill of a Franklin's Gull. The wing pattern and gray-brown crown, nape, and upperparts identified the bird as a juvenile Sabine's Gull.

This is the sixth record of a Sabine's Gull in Iowa. There are three old records and three recent ones, all from fall. The other recent records are both from Saylorville Reservoir: 10-24 November 1983 (Kent, T. H. 1983. Sabine's Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 53: 105-106) and 5 October 1986 (IBL 57: 17, 78).

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50010

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER IN MUSCATINE COUNTY

GERALD WHITE



On 12 May 1988, I was taking an early morning birding walk in Wild Cat Den State Park. At 7:20 a.m., I was in an area of the woods that had an edge transition zone, when a small bird flew out of heavy cover and landed about 30 feet away in a small bare tree. Although the bird had its back to me, it did turn and look at me twice during its brief period of exposure. I was able to

see the following features: mid-sized warbler by shape and size (about 5 inches long); black crown; back and rump had the base color of dark olive with black spots that were most noticeable around the shoulder area (The spots gave the impression of streaking.); two white wing bars; dull white undertail coverts; some dark feathers in the shape of possible spots near the flank; cheek and ear covered with a good-sized patch of black surrounded with yellow (Each color had intense color saturation.); black throat; and dark and warbler-shaped bill.

I was not able to see the side or complete front of the bird; however, the features of the head and throat as illustrated in the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* were those of a male Townsend's Warbler. The black spots clinched my identification in the field. I did not realize until evening that I had seen a record bird (second for Iowa) and, regretfully, had not notified many fellow birders. A subsequent search with tape recordings on the following day failed to produce the bird again.

1505 E. 5th St., Muscatine, Iowa 52761

VERMILION FLYCATCHER AT RICE LAKE

GERALD ANDERSON



A male Vermilion Flycatcher was found catching insects along a small creek that runs into Rice Lake in Worth County at 10:30 a.m. on 13 May 1988. It had a red breast, brown streak between the red on the top of the head and the red throat, and brown wings. It was smaller than a Cardinal. The bird repeatedly swooped down from its perch on a small tree to catch insects and returned to a perch. Curt Rector and I watched the bird for five minutes from a distance of 30 to 40 feet in bright sunlight.

RR2, Lake Mills, IA 50450

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FROM DIANE PORTER

I have some questions about Chimney Swifts that I hope *Iowa Bird Life* readers can answer for me: (1) Do Chimney Swifts roosting or nesting in chimneys create any fire hazard?; and (2) Do their droppings cause any significant inconvenience or health hazard?

Migrating Chimney Swifts return each year in flocks numbering several thousand birds to ancestral roosting places. I talked by telephone in 1987 with Chimney Swift expert Richard B. Fischer, retired Professor of Environmental Education, Cornell University. He told me that Chimney Swifts do not nest communally. The large aggregations of birds are nonbreeding individuals, those that have finished their nesting for the season, and migrating birds. In light of this information, one would not expect a buildup of nests to cause a fire hazard in the chimneys used by large flocks in migration. Also, I have heard the speculation that the birds' movements in and out of the chimneys actually help clean the chimneys and hence reduce the fire hazard.

Documentation for One, male Townsend's Warbler

Seen by Gerald White, 1505 E. 5th., St., Muscatine, IA. 52761
319/263-3464. At Wild Cat Den State Park in a small area of bottom
land of deciduous woods on May 12, 1988 at 7:20 AM, for approximately
45 seconds.

The bird size was approx. 5 inches long and shaped like a mid-size
warbler. At first I could only see the bird from the back, as it was
facing away from me. I saw a black crown - some yellow on the side
of the head - the back of the neck was dark - the back and rump had
a base color of dark olive, subtle black spots formed a faint streaked
appearance which was most noticeable on the shoulder area - the left
wing had two white wing bars that was fairly bold - the tail appeared
dark with a couple slivers of white showing on the edging. (mostly
dark) - I could see some of the undertail coverts, they were a dull
white. The bird then turned it's head to it's left, to about a 10:00
oclock position. I could then see the side of the head and bill.

The cheek and ear ^{area} ~~area~~ was covered with a good sized patch of black
^{which} ~~and~~ was surrounded with a yellow border. Both the patch and border
was of intense color saturation. The bill was dark and warbler shape.

In the next few seconds the bird exposed more of the undertail coverts
as it defecated. I noticed near the flank, some dark feathers in the
shape of possible spots. The white feathers were changing in tone,
from white near the rectum, to a duller white with a hint of yellow
stain nearer the flank. (I made a mental note to look for color change
and markings if the bird turned to the side) The bird turned it's
head again, this time to about 9:00 oclock. I again noticed how
bold the black and yellow pattern on the head was. I could also see
the left side of the throat, it was a uniform dark black - widest at
the bottom and tapering on a well defined line to under the bill.
At this point I knew that I had never seen a bird of this description
before. The bird then turned back to the 12:00 oclock position and I
scanned it again making mental note that the bird had dark legs. I
didn't make a conscious observation of the feet, but they must have
blended with the leg color. The other features were unchanged. From
the back it had an overall darkish appearance.

The bird didn't make any sounds.

The bird was casually sitting on a bare branch and looking to it's left of occasion. I felt it was observing me since I was to the rear ~~and~~ slightly to it's left. The bird had entered my vision area from my left and from heavy cover. It flew into the open at my front and turned and lit in a bare tree. When it flew off, it returned to the area it had appeared from. I was located near the confluence of two creeks, the ground is flat and has a wood edge transition zone. (brush to open woods on the bordering slopes)

With the first look at the head I thought of a possible Blackburnian but when I saw the neck I knew I had a new bird for myself. The most striking features being the head and throat markings. I carry a N.G.S. second edition field guide, and after the bird had flown off I opened the book to the warbler section and thumbed thru until I came to the illustration of the male Townsend's Warbler. At that first glance I thought - that's it. I then checked the rest of the birds listed and made the summation that I had seen the Townsend's. That evening when I returned from work I checked my Golden, Peterson, N.G.S. and Audubon Master Guide for their accounts of the Townsend's and similar species. I eliminated the following; Hermit Warbler - no cheek patch: Blackburnian - doesn't have a black throat: Black-throated Green - has solid back color and cheek patch not as bold, no black cap. Of the references mentioned, the N.G.S. has the most accurate illustration of the birds head but I can't verify that the bird I saw did or didn't have yellow under the eye.

The sky was clear and the bird was in bright open shade light. At aprox. 30 feet away and 12 feet up in a bare tree. (no leaves) I was using IOX40 Leitz binoculars.

I called Peter Petersen Of Davenport, IA that night and asked his opinion of similar species and if the absence of a view of the breast and flank would eliminate the need for a documentation. He felt I had seen the Townsend and should report it. He also mentioned that we had had strong west winds recently.

Written notes made evening of 5/12/88. Documentation completed 5/16/88

Gerald White