

Western Tanager

8 May 1969

Storm Lake, Beuna Vista Co., IA

Mrs. E. G. Crocker

Crocker 1969

Record Number: 81-EG
Classification: A-D

REFERENCE

Crocker, Mrs. E.G. 1969. Iowa's first Western Tanager. IBL
39:44.

VOTE (1981): 1-II, 6-III

III, key marks described.

III, 2 observers, sight record. May record of male.

Documentation probably OK.

III, Fair description. Note that the Forney Lake bird (5
below) was also with Y-R Warblers.

Western Tanager

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Iowa's First Western Tanager -- On May 8 at 10 A. M. C.D.T. another rare visitor was spotted in the Storm Lake vicinity -- a male WESTERN TANAGER. For the past twelve years during the warbler migration, Mrs. Phil Thornton and I have planned to spend as many May mornings as possible observing the warblers. Supplied with bird books, binoculars, a thermos of coffee and sweet rolls, we drive to what is known locally as West Park. We park the car where we can look into some of the shrub borders near the lake, and sit quietly in the car to observe. West Park is a state-owned 13 acre strip of land between Storm Lake and Little Storm Lake on the west side of Iowa 110. It is an open wooded blue grass tract with borders of woody shrubs and scattered trees. Borders contain gooseberry bushes and wild roses. Tree species include Choke Cherry, Wild Plum, Ash, Slippery Elm, Box Elder, Cottonwood and Mulberry. Trees are of various ages and sizes up to 50 ft. in height. Some spruce trees were planted in the area about 7 years ago. Within the area are short unpaved trails used by cars and pedestrians.

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The morning of May 8 was a beautiful clear day after light showers the day before. Temperature was in the fifties. Many insects were flying, and we were watching the large number of Myrtle Warblers feeding on the insects when Ruth exclaimed, "What is that bird with the bright red head?--I've never seen one like it before." Then the bird came into full view. The brilliant colors were breath-taking, and we had little trouble identifying it as a male Western Tanager. The red on the face extended over the top of the head. The wings and back were black and the body yellow. The yellow wing bars were very prominent. It came to about 20 ft. from the car, and we had several good looks at it with and without binoculars. The bird worked in the shrub borders about 8 ft. off the ground, and we saw him catching insects. Once he flew out much like a flycatcher to catch an insect. Edward Forbush mentions that the Western Tanager is expert in catching insects both in trees and on the wing, and that the bird pursues them through the air in the manner of a flycatcher. One border where we saw the Tanager flanks little Storm Lake, and runs the full length of the strip of land. There are intermittent thickets along this border. On the opposite or highway side where we observed him when he flew across one of the auto trails in the park is a similar border which extends only a short distance along the highway. We could not see where he went when he finally

disappeared from view. My husband and I have returned to the same place several times, but we have not seen him again. I can only hope he will someday appear to some other birder who will be as thrilled at his beauty and rarity as we were. Incidentally, I have a small collection of Spode china bird figurines. The only western bird in the collection happens to be a Western Tanager. Now, that figurine will mean more to me than it ever did.--MRS. EDWIN G. CROCKER, 720 E. 1st. St., Storm Lake.