

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
20 Mar 1997
Waterman Prairie, O'Brien Co., IA
*Tim Waltz
IBL 68:87

Record Number: 97-18
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Tim Waltz, 302 19th St., Spirit Lake 51360 [10/1/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: none
Records Committee: IBL 68:87

VOTE: 4 A-D, 3 NA

A-D, This is an extremely unusual date and number for this species, but adult males are unlikely to be confused with any other species, and they were apparently seen at fairly close range.

A-D, The number (18) and early date are incredulous, but there is no other species with the combination of ID marks observed.

NA, This record has me truly perplexed. A flock of grosbeaks like this might occur on the Gulf Coast during a fallout in late April but in Iowa in March? The description sounds good, but there are just too many negative factors to vote beyond a reasonable doubt.

NA, If this was a sighting of 1 single bird, the description would still need to be more rigorous. An oddly casual description of a seemingly bizarre event.

NA, I find no precedent in nearby states for this species to occur in March except for very rare over-wintering birds. Flocks suggest migrants that just arrived. Could a storm have caused such a strange anomaly? I believe the viewers, but for an event that seems to have a 0% probability, I have to take the conservative view.

A-D, Exceptionally early spring date, especially considering the cooler than usual spring and that a lot of migrants were getting to the state late.

A-D, Unprecedented, amazing report. NE has 2 Mar reports, but neither are documented. Earliest arrival in south Apr 10-12.

RE-VOTE (by mail): 4 NA, 3 A-D

A-D, No change from my previous opinion. A perplexing sighting.

NA, Still enough doubt here to stay conservative.

NA, These birds were apparently paid very little attention after first ID was made, and not investigated. How many males were there to ID? 2? 17? What were forest birds doing for 2 hrs. in March sumac that would provide them with almost no food or cover? What did the females look like, or is it just assumed that there were female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks? Without any comment from the other two observers on this event, I believe it is possible that a misidentification went unchallenged or that a chance to study and document an amazing occurrence was missed. I

97-18

welcome the input of the others present at the time.

NA, I agree with the reviewer who wrote "An oddly casual description of a seemingly bizarre event." The more bizarre, the more proof that is required.

A-D, As stated previously, an unprecedented event, but not implausible.

What species? Rose-Breasted Grosbeak How many? 18Location? Watermans Prairie - 5 miles S.E. of Sutherland, IAType of habitat? Timber Ridges with interspersed native prairie knobsWhen? date(s): March 20, 1997 time: 10:30 am to 12:30 pmWho? your name and address: Tim Waltz 302 19th St Spirit Lake, IA 51360others with you: Maury Muhl, Gary Wee

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.

We observed 18 Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks fly to a ~~patch~~ small tree surrounded by a 1/4 acre patch of sumac. This patch of sumac was located on the ~~side~~ south side of a steep native prairie knob. They flew directly overhead. The males were easily distinguished by their ~~orange~~ rose colored bib, white breast, black head, and white wing patches. The wind was blowing ~20-25 mph from the south so we could not hear them calling.

They flew to this sumac patch several times within a 2 hour period. They flew directly over us so we are very confident of our identifications.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

Viewed them on a sunny day. They flew directly over us at a height of about 15 ft, then landed in a small tree about 40 feet away from us.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen them very often, especially in the spring + fall.References and persons consulted before writing description: E& ThelenHow long before field notes made? same day March 20, 1997 this form completed? April 9, 1997MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52240

June 5, 1997

Ed Thelen
15362 250th St.
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

Dear Ed,

Thanks for your field reports, which contain a lot of good stuff.

We looked for your Pacific Loon on May 8th, but only saw a Common in partial molt. Your photos and documentation were nice to see after we had seen the wrong bird.

I assume that we can copy the photos to use for the records committee. And I assume you are sending the slides because I requested them before. This system will work fine as long as you indicate that you want the slides back (lacking this I assume they can be kept). I will return the slides in about a week.

I will pass the Rufous Hummingbird article on to Jim Dinsmore along with a copy of your photo.

My main reason for writing at this time is to inquire about the documentation of 18 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks on March 20. This record is so incredible that I find it hard to believe. Can you provide any information on the experience of the observers (Tim Waltz, Maury Muhm, Gary Wee). Was this date really correct? It sounds like they did not use binoculars.

I have not heard of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks occurring in such large groups. The date is a month earlier than the first birds should arrive and 1.5 months earlier than large numbers would be expected.

I cannot imagine what other species these birds might be.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246