

Townsend's Warbler
11 May 1991
Stone Park, Woodbury Co., IA
*Bill Garthright
IBL 61:95, 62:71

Record Number: 91-24
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

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REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:95
Records Committee: IBL 62:71

VOTE: 7-A-D

A-D, Document very accurately describes Townsend's Warbler.
Good details.

A-D, Excellent, detailed documentation.

A-D, Bill, this was an excellent description and analysis.
Thank you for documenting an extraordinary Iowa sighting.

A-D, This bird was seen for 15 minutes at close range with the characteristic's of Townsend's Warbler freshly in mind. The yellow under eye crescent is particularly diagnostic, along with
1) black crown and nape. 2) black throat with straight line demarcation at breast. 3) black auricular. 4) yellow breast. 5) black streaked flanks. 6) two bold white wing bars. The above characteristics are diagnostic enough to overlook the fact that the observer wasn't able to see the back good enough to see the black streaks.

A-D, Bird well seen and described. The observer's full description of his thought process and sequence of events is very helpful and convincing. The previous two records for Iowa are much less detailed and less convincing than this one. I don't know the observer, but I'm impressed by his documentation.

A-D, Excellent description of Townsend's Warbler. I see nothing in this documentation that would make this bird anything other than a Townsend's Warbler.

A-D, Excellent documentation with lots of good identifying details. This is probably the 3rd state record of a Townsend's Warbler. One was seen May 7, 1950, in Davenport. The second one was seen on May 12, 1999, at Wildcat Den S.P. in S.E. Iowa.
Thanks for contributing to Iowa's birding records!

May 21, 1991

Misc. Notes on Townsend's Warbler

When I first saw the warbler -- and realized I didn't know what it was -- I briefly checked my field guide to confirm that it wasn't some forgotten plumage of the Black-throated Green Warbler. I noticed, in passing, that it looked quite like the Townsend's Warbler (which is on the same page as the Black-throated Green in my National Geographic guide) but I deliberately did not look closely at any other descriptions. At that point, all I wanted to know was that it was something different (to tell the truth, I suspected it would turn out to be some kind of hybrid).

I put the field guide away and studied the bird for a good five minutes or so. It sang several times, but I'm not very good at describing -- or even remembering -- songs. It was high-pitched, thin, and very "warbler-like," somewhat gritty or burry at first, then clearing and rising slightly. It wasn't a very distinctive, loud, or noticeable song. [I listened to a tape of a Townsend's Warbler song when I returned to Lincoln the next day. As far as I could tell, this was very similar, though not exactly the same.]

After I'd seen and noted everything I could think of (the bird was very cooperative and gave me excellent looks), I took out my notebook and made quick, rough notes of what I was seeing. I looked at the warbler a couple of times while I was doing this. Then I took out my field guide and identified the bird as a Townsend's Warbler. It was really very easy to identify. When I put my field guide away, the bird was gone and I wasn't able to spot it again.

This bird was almost exactly a duplicate of the male Townsend's Warbler pictured in the National Geographic guide (mine is the first edition). Two minor differences: First, the crown and nape appeared to be blacker than shown, with a very strong contrast between the nape and the back. Secondly, I didn't see any streaking on the back of this bird. I didn't get as good of looks at the upperparts (only rather quick looks as it was flitting around), but what I did see looked plain grayish or greenish-gray.

I knew that the Loess Hills Audubon Society was having a Birdathon this day (Saturday, May 11) and so I drove around the park looking for someone to tell of this sighting. I couldn't find anyone, but I did find a parked car with Iowa license plates that read "BIRDS." I left a message under the driver's windshield wiper, and included two South Sioux City phone numbers where I could be reached that weekend (as well as information about where, when, and what I had seen). I was never called or otherwise contacted by these people, and I don't know who they were or if they got the message.

Also, I tried calling Bill Huser of South Sioux City all that day and on Sunday morning, without success. I knew he was birding all day Saturday (for the Birdathon), but I had hoped to leave him a message. As far as I know, no one else saw this warbler and I don't even know if anyone went looking for it. Also, since I was just visiting South Sioux City that weekend, I didn't have the number of the Iowa Rare Bird Alert with me, either.

I'd appreciate hearing of your final opinions of this sighting and how often Townsend's Warblers have been seen in Iowa.

Thank you,

Bill

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