

Swainson's Warbler
12 May 1994
Ames, Story Co., IA
*John Mayfield
IBL 64:78, 82

Record Number: 94-17
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

John Mayfield [19 Aug 1994]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:78

Records Committee: IBL 65:82

VOTE: 1 A-D, 6 NA

NA, The cap of Swainson's Warbler should be a dull brown, not nearly so rusty as to invite comparison with Chipping Sparrow. While it is certainly possible that a Swainson's Warbler might reach Iowa, having done so I doubt very much it would be found in the habitat described. This species feeds on the ground or near the ground in dense tangles. Despite the observer's comment, I feel this could have been a western Palm Warbler, which can be very pale and nondescript.

NA, I cannot argue with the description of this bird -- it clearly appears to be a Swainson's Warbler. I understand that there is a record from SE Nebraska, so an Iowa record could be possible, albeit extraordinary. Unfortunately, the bird did not sing, which would have eliminated any argument either way. Without the song, there is a slight possibility of identification error, possibly confusion with Tennessee Warbler.

NA, Description could fit a pale Palm. Leg color which would be a key characteristic between Palm and Swainson's not noted.

A-D, Good description of an unexpected record. The comparison of color with a Chipping Sparrow is especially helpful in analyzing this report. I understand that there were several overshoots in the Midwest this spring.

NA, This record is very difficult for me to judge -- a brief, single-observer sighting of a very unlikely species by an observer that I do not know. The cap of a Swainson's Warbler is brown, not rusty. I can't judge whether this is a difference in word usage or perception, or a real color. Swainson's Warbler looks very flat-headed and long-billed. "Warbler-like" vs. "not sparrow-like" is not very specific. I don't know what to make of the faint striping along the sides of the breast. The Swainson's Warblers that I have seen sang loudly. Too bad this bird did not sing. There are a very few vagrant spring records from NE, IL, IN, and OH as far north as Chicago.

NA, Female Black-throated Blue Warbler not eliminated. Swainson's I have seen were more olive on the back than brown. Also Swainson's I am familiar with spends more time on or near the ground than up in trees as this bird did. They are usually very secretive and extremely hard to see. Possibility of Orange-crowned with crown showing its orange color not considered. This is an extremely shy and hard to see species a long way from its known pattern of vagrancy. I think we should be cautious on this one. We should talk about this record and others at our July/August meeting.

NA, Tough decision -- deliberate activity and plumage description reminiscent of vireo -- Red-eyed or Warbling. "Rusty" cap if correct is suggestive of Swainson's, although is not my impression of Swainson's crown -- brownish? Also height in trees is uncharacteristic.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

94-17

What species? Swainson's Warbler How many? 1

Location? Brookside Park, Ames IA

Type of Habitat? Open parkland, Large trees with grass beneath.

When? date(s): May 12, 1994 time: 12:50 PM to 12:55 PM.

Who? your name and address: John Mayfield

Others with you: none

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A warbler, with rusty cap and white eye stripe. Back plain brown (color of olive backed Thrush) showing bars or tail patterns. Bill, warbler like not sparrow-like.

Breast & belly, dingy white-plum. shape, warbler-like.

Behavior, ~~slow~~ slow working through the ~~lower~~ lower levels of the trees. Not hyper-active - no tail wagging. Did not fly far, or to ground or to tree tops.

See attached notes

Similar species; how eliminated:

Chipping sparrow: ^{observed warbler had} less vibrant color, ^{was} less active, warbler bill not sparrow bill.

Palm warbler: no yellow or yellowish color, no tail wagging.
definitely not a palm warbler.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? I am very confident of identification
If yes, explain:

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

clear sunny day, light wind, 30-40 feet (est), 8 power B&L Binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen species before (20 years ago). very familiar with chipping sparrow.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins, Birds of America. consulted after making identification.

How long before field notes made? 1 hr this form completed? 8 days

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

12:50 PM Thurs May 12

Brookside Park.

slowly working trees 15'-20' from ground in ^{picnic} ~~picnic~~ area.

Head: rusty cap (seemed narrower and longer than chipping sparrow)

white eye stripe, less prominent, ^{dark} line through eye.

colors of cap & eye stripe not as vibrant as chipping sparrow

Back: dingy brown, ^(nutritious) feather pattern, but no wing bars set,

Tail: sand.

Breast: plain but dingy, ^{visible} almost faint striping along sides of breast.

no bright white areas

Shape: warbler like

bill warbler-like, not sparrow-like.

Song: did not sing.

viewing conditions: excellent, light wind, sunny
got a very good look.

Experience: I have seen Swainson's warblers many years ago in W. Va.

John Mayfield

2:00 PM.

5/12/94.