

Curve-billed Thrasher
25 Jun 1975
Spirit Lake, Dickinson Co., IA
Lorraine Wallace
Wallace 1975

Record Number: 81-CG
Classification: A-D

REFERENCE

Wallace, L. 1975. Curve-billed Thrasher at Spirit Lake. IBL 45:96.
Records Committee: IBL 64:70

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Tom Kent to Records Committee, 13 Sep 1993

VOTE (1981): 4-III, 2-IV, 1-V

IV, Very poor detail, observer not known, eye color and body color only clues.

IV, description fits but is not very detailed.

III, no photo or other experienced obs.

V, No details reported of a bird held in hand -- except that had a red eye. Streaked breast and black wing tips.

III, Acceptable description -- this is the only red-eyed thrasher.

REVOTE (1993): 7 A-D

A-D, Good description.

A-D, Bendire's evidently does some wandering around and, unlike Curve-billed, is migratory. Kaufman (Adv. Birding) says its eye may tend toward yellow orange, but adds that it's never as orange as in some Curve-bills. While most guides don't make much of eye color for separation of these two, there seems to be agreement that if the eye is bright orange, it's a Curve-bill. Confusing eye color with blood seems to meet the test. Note the excellent photo on the back of the Dec. 1991 Birding.

A-D, Red eye along with plumage description is diagnostic. Too bad the bill wasn't better described.

13 September 1993

To: IOU Records Committee
From: Tom Kent
Re: Request for reconsideration of record

Record: 81-CG Curve-billed Thrasher

Reason for request: Inadequate evaluation of evidence in first review.

Comment: I have long thought this record to be correct, but I likely voted not to accept it in 1981. The bird was viewed in hand and the following findings were noted: red eyes, thrasher bill, long tail shading from gray to black, body gray shading to darker gray with black wing tips and streaked breast. Although size is not given, the reference to brown thrasher suggests that it was that size. The fact that it was caught in a dust storm on the 24th of June suggests that it was traveling. Local birds would be likely to seek cover in such circumstances. The date seems unusual, but we now have another spring record. The eye color varies in different references, but I think red (or perhaps orange) is acceptable.

Curve-billed Thrasher

Wallace, L. 1975. Curve-billed Thrasher at Spirit Lake. IBL 45:96.

Curve-billed Thrasher at Spirit Lake -- On the 24th of June Dickinson County was visited by some unusual forces of nature. A large black cloud which enveloped the southwestern sky proved to be a strangling dust storm, which was followed by driving rain that struck the ground in stinging sheets. As if that weren't enough, we were pelted by hailstones that lay on the ground for an hour like a blanket of snow.

The following afternoon, some twenty-four hours after the storm, my daughters discovered a bird sitting quietly on the graveled right of way in front of our farm home. The bird was completely covered with mud and seemed to be bleeding from the eyes. It had a definite thrasher bill, but was far too muddy to further identify.

We filled a basin with tepid water and began the clean up process, starting with the bird's eyes. After washing away the mud with a piece of soft cotton, we realized what we had first thought to be blood, was nothing more than two bright red eyes, which were alert and certainly not blind, as we'd first feared. The bill, which was stuck tightly shut with mud, was cleaned and its mouth was also filled with mud. It had gobs of hardened mud clinging to its feet and we picked them gently off. All of this I might add, was not to the bird's liking, and I can testify to the fact that a thrasher's bill is razor sharp and a lethal weapon.

We washed the mud from its body and a long thrasher tail, shading from gray to black was revealed. The body was gray, shading to a darker gray with black-wingtips and it had a streaked breast. Certainly not the familiar Brown Thrasher with which we are familiar, so we unearthed the field guides.

We identified it as a Curve-billed Thrasher, for that is all it could have been. All the good field guides tell us that this bird is a native of the southwestern United States and is not migratory. What then was it doing completely off course, in northwest Iowa, suffering the aftermath of a hail and mud storm? This bird nests in mesquite bushes and cacti . . . what then was it doing in nesting season in a land of maple trees and honeysuckle bushes?

We learned from visiting with Gladys Black that we should have taken a photograph for identification confirmation, but only our family and a few neighbors saw it. We shall know better if and when there is a "next time."

After determining that it was not in any way injured we took it down to our grove and released it, as the bird obviously was not enjoying its captivity. We hope we did the right thing, but it flew to the top of the nearest ash tree and then winged skyward and we have not seen it since.

Of one thing we are certain . . . discoveries such as this are what makes this business of bird watching such an interesting and exciting adventure. LORAIN WALLACE, Spirit Lake.