

Mountain Bluebird
19 Mar 1989
n of Emmetsburg, Palo Alto Co., IA
*Thelen
IBL 59:83, 61:85

Record Number: 89-17
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Ed Thelen

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:83

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Thelen, E. 1989. Mountain Bluebird in Palo Alto County. IBL
59:124.

VOTE: 6 A-D

A-D. Good description of male Mountain Bluebird.

A-D. All necessary field marks noted to eliminate all other
species.

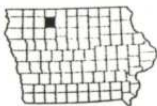
A-D. Description adequate to confirm ID.

SENT TO: Ed Thelen, RR Box 7414-A, Spirit Lake, IA 51360.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD IN PALO ALTO COUNTY

ED THELEN

At 1:30 p.m. on 19 March 1989, my wife, Linda, and I were traveling south on N-40 just north of Emmetsburg in Palo Alto County when I spotted a bluebird perched on a fence post next to the road. After turning around and pulling off the road, we were amazed to see a male Mountain Bluebird. It was readily identified by its uniform blue plumage including breast, head, and back. It flew after a few minutes to another post. While flying the undertail feathers showed white coloration. Its size was similar to an Eastern Bluebird. The eyes, bill, and feet appeared all dark. The head, back, shoulders, rump, and tail were a bright blue; the breast, throat, belly, and flanks were a more subdued blue. We observed the bird for about 20 minutes. I returned to the area the following afternoon but failed to locate the bird.



RR Box 7414-A, Spirit Lake, Iowa 51360.

REVIEWS

Wildfowl—An Identification Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World by Steve Madge and Hilary Burn. London: Christopher Helm. 1988. 298 pp., 47 color plates, hardbound \$35.00.

REVIEWED BY JAMES J. DINSMORE

This, the third in a series of specialized identification guides (others cover seabirds and shorebirds), considers all 155 waterfowl species found worldwide. Color plates illustrate each species in several plumages and in flight. For many species both sexes, eclipse plumages, and/or juvenile birds are shown. A map showing breeding and non-breeding ranges, a brief verbal description of its range and habitat, and a summary of key field marks are on the page opposite the plate. Species accounts include field identification (both sitting and in flight), a detailed description, voice, bare parts coloration, measurements, geographic variation, habits, habitat, distribution, population estimates, and references. A glossary, three pages of references, and an index (which doubles as a checklist) end the book.

This book is too large (6 x 9.5 inches) to be a field guide. I would rate the plates, which are what most observers will use most, as generally quite good. They are especially strong for the sea ducks (e.g., scoters, eiders, Oldsquaw) and illustrate a wide range of plumages. I considered the 39 species of waterfowl reported from Iowa and compared the number of different plumages shown in this book with four other books that Iowa birders often use. The following are the total number of plumages shown in each: Peterson Eastern Guide (81), Robbins (86), National Geographic guide (116), Bellrose (128), and this book (156). Thus the book does have more illustrations than the others. However, the white-breasted form of the blue phase Snow Goose that we commonly see in Iowa is not illustrated.

I found several things that bothered me. Most irritating was the placement of the maps and written material on the pages facing the illustrations. In 28 of 47 plates, the written information is not placed directly opposite the bird's illustration. Thus, the written material on the Snow Goose is at the top of the page but the illustration is at the bottom of the facing plate. Each species is numbered on the plate and in the description so you can match them up, but it should have been easy to rearrange the material to match better. I was surprised to find that for population estimates of North America species they used 1975 data; such counts are made yearly and more recent data are available. Surprisingly, they claim the American Wigeon is the most numerous North American duck although their data clearly show otherwise. On the other hand, they do mention the 1984-1985 Bean Goose at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. Overall, I give this book high marks. It will do little to help identify the common plumages that we often encounter, but it will be useful to Iowans who want to identify the out-of-range or odd-plumaged bird.

4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50010

What species? Mountain Bluebird How many? 1Location? North of Emmetsburg on blacktop N-40 in Palo Alto CountyType of habitat? Along roadside- cultivated field, brushy tile nearbyWhen? date(s): March 19, 1989 time: 1:30 to 1:50 p.m.Who? your name and address: Ed Thelen- RBox 7114-A Spirit Lake, Iowa 51360others with you: Linda Thelen- same addressothers before or after you: no

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.

While traveling south on N-40 heading into Emmetsburg I spotted a bird perched on a fence post next to the road that appeared all blue. After turning around and pulling over along side the road, my wife and I were amazed to see a male mountain bluebird. It was readily identified by its uniform blue plumage including breast, head and back. It flew after a few moments to another post. While flying the undertail feathers showed white coloration.

Its size was similar to an eastern bluebird. Its eyes, bill and feet appeared all dark. Its head, back, shoulders, rump and tail were a bright blue, while its breast, throat, belly and flanks were a more subdued blue color.

Similar species and how eliminated: Eastern Bluebird and Western Bluebird have rust on breast; this bird was all blue.

Indigo Bunting- size is smaller and doesn't have white under the tail. Also a darker blue color.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

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

Good-- Less than 20 ft. viewed through 7x35 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Linda and I observed mountain bluebirds out west on two occasions.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Birds of North America, R.B.Z. & Paster Guide to Birding-J. Farrand, Jr., Iowa Birds-D.K.K.P. & Roosa Singer

How long before field notes made? 10 min. this form completed? 2 daysMAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA 52240