

Mountain Bluebird

7 Apr 1979

along Big Sioux River, Sioux Co., IA

\*John Van Dyk

IBL 49:61, Van Dyk 1981

Record Number: 93-GB

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

John Van Dyk

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 49:61

Van Dyk, J. 1981. Mountain Bluebird in northwest Iowa. IBL  
51:132.

VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, A good description of the bird and circumstances made  
from notes by an observer who realized the importance of the  
record. /thk

Van Dyk, J. 1981. Mountain Bluebird in northwest Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 51:132.

Mountain Bluebird in Northwest Iowa -- On Saturday morning, April 7, 1979, my nephew Mike Van Dyk, a freshman at Dordt College, and I discovered a Mountain Bluebird in extreme western Sioux County, less than a mile from the South Dakota border. The bird, either a female or a male coming out of winter plumage, allowed a rather close approach, to within approximately 20 feet. Weather and light conditions were excellent. As soon as we saw the blue of the bird we realized that we were not looking at an Eastern Bluebird. The blue on the lower back and tail was lighter and of a different, more cerulean quality, quite unlike the intense blue of the Eastern Bluebird. The underparts were clear grayish, with no hint of rust or red anywhere. The bird further distinguished itself by the absence of the hunched posture so typical of the other bluebirds. Mike and I wrote a complete documentation on the spot; we were allowed ample time to do so, as the bird was in no hurry moving from fence post to fence post. I am personally quite familiar with the Mountain Bluebird, having observed it on numerous occasions in Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.

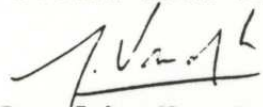
We sighted the bird in an area where other western species occur not uncommonly. Lark Buntings, for example, can be found in the same location at times. Say's Phoebe has nested in a similar situation to the south of this area (western Plymouth Co. -- cf. September, 1977, issue of IBL). Kim Eckert has seen the Mountain Bluebird just to the north, in Rock Co., southwestern Minnesota (cf. A Birder's Guide to Minnesota, p. 75). In February, 1979, a Townsend's Solitaire was present at Sheldon, some 20 miles to the east. DR. JOHN VAN DYK, 736 E. 1st Street, Sioux Center, 51250

Halmi, N. S. 1979. Field reports. Iowa Bird Life 49:56-63 (p 61)

found them only sporadically, and those who have nesting boxes (DB, DMs) report poor occupancy. A female Mountain Bluebird seen in W. Sioux County on April 7 (JV) appears to be only third record for Iowa.

Documentation

1. Species: Mountain Bluebird, 1 individual. ~~W~~ ♀
2. Location: Along dirt road through dry hilly fields bordering the Big Sioux River in extreme western Sioux Co., approximately 1½ miles south-east of Hudson, S.D, and approximately 2½ miles north of junction of Big Sioux and Rock Rivers.
3. Date: April 7, 1979. Time: 10.30 - 11.00 a.m.
4. Description: As soon as we saw the bird we recognized it as a Bluebird. The bird did not exhibit the typical hunched posture of the Eastern Bluebird. The blue color was most conspicuous on lower back and tail. The blue of top of head and wings was a more brownish-grayish blue. Underparts gray, with no hint of red or rusty on breast or underparts. Chin area lighter gray with a pale gray-brownish tinge. No spots and no reddish tinge on breast area. The bird gave a three-tone effect: beautifully blue on lower back and tail, brownish blue on crown and wings, and grayish-white underparts and side of face. Bill, legs, and eye dark.
5. Behavior: The bird moved from fence post to fence post, here and there dropping into a gully to pick up small caterpillars. Occasionally it would fly somewhat higher up and hover.
6. Habitat: Area of open dry rolling hills between Big Sioux and Rock Rivers.
7. Elimination of similar appearing species: The blue of Eastern and Western Bluebird is much deeper than of this bird. Both these species show reddish or rusty on breast, and both exhibit a distinctive hunched position. There is no possibility of confusion with Blue Grosbeak (which occurs in our area in summer): its large conical beak and blue underparts exclude it. The Indigo Bunting is dark blue all over and has a sparrow-like bill.
8. Equipment: We walked to within 30 feet of the bird, then followed it slowly and carefully with the car, coming to within 25 feet. We used 8x40 binoculars.
9. Weather: A bright sunny day, temperature 50 F., wind SE about 15-20 mph. As the bird flitted from post to post and from one side of road to the other, we were able to observe all features clearly.
10. Previous experience: I have seen the Mountain Bluebird in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. I am quite familiar with the Western Bluebird (having lived in California where it is fairly common) and Eastern Bluebird (which occurs here regularly).
11. Other observers: Mike Van Dyk, my nephew, a freshman student at Dordt College here in Sioux Center was with me. He agreed with the identification, and took copious notes in the field as we were describing the bird.
12. We carried only Petersen's Eastern guide with us, so we depended entirely on observation and description.
13. I wrote this description immediately upon my return from the birding trip.



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