

Black-headed Grosbeak

Record Number: 96-24

12 May 1996

Classification: NA

Conservation Board Headquarters, Warren Co., IA

\*Jim Sinclair

IBL 66:107; 67:83

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Sinclair, 810 North B St., Indianola [4/6/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:107

Records Committee: IBL 67:83

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 NA

A-D, "Warm buff" breast and "scant" streaking are separating field marks, especially the minimal streaking -- Morlan, Birding, Aug 1991.

A-D, Faint streaking and warm buff seems indicative of Black-headed vs. Rose-breasted.

NA, Female grosbeaks are among the more difficult identification problems in Iowa. For a bird under observation for 15 minutes, we have a warm buff breast and scant streaking as the only description. Although these features suggest Black-headed Grosbeak, I would like to have a complete description of the bird and much better detail on the field marks seen. E.g., what does "scant" mean? What was bill color?

A-D, Adequate description of female Black-headed Grosbeak.

REVOTE: 6 NA, 1 A-D

NA, I am unsure how to interpret "scant" streaking on the breast and flanks. Was the streaking bold, fine, or non-existent? A description of bill color would have been useful.

NA, The direct comparison with female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks is strong supporting evidence. However, because no bill color, underwing lining, or streaking was described I am changing my vote to NA.

A-D, Warm buff color of breast and "scant" streaking on breast and flanks should ID female Black-headed.

NA, While I think this was a Black-headed Grosbeak (and I believe the weather pattern just prior to this report would support the occurrence of a vagrant), I will change to a more conservative vote due to the difficulty in adequately describing the differences in Black-headed vs. Rose-breasted vs. hybrid. Females may well require a photo.

NA, nothing to add to my previous comment.

NA, I was skeptical about this species the first time around and the comment from Ken Brock makes it clear to me that we should deal with the female plumage of this species more carefully.

NA, I believe that this bird is most likely a hybrid showing mostly Black-headed characters. How much Black-headed phenotype should a bird have before we call it a Black-headed and not a hybrid? (Compare with Iceland-Kumlien's-Thayer's gulls). Because

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the description is minimal, especially regarding the amount of pale area on the belly and central breast (if any) I cannot decide how "Black-headed" it was, and will concede it to be a hybrid. I will also concede that it is strange that most Iowa reports of Black-headed Grosbeak are of "females"; the occurrence of a "good" male would nudge the debate back toward Black-headed, I suspect.



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10 July 1996

Thomas H. Kent  
211 Richards Street  
Iowa City, IA 52246

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the spring summary for Iowa. It turned out to be a remarkable spring. The mid-May passerine fallout was extremely intense in the Chicago area; hundreds of birds were grounded, providing an amazing spectacle.

In addition, herons & egrets went crazy in the central states, providing exceptional counts and several first nesting records. The season was topped off by invading Western Tanagers (across Region) and Lazuli Buntings (western state only).

I greatly value the critical comments you provided with your report. Some of my thoughts are:

Neotropical Cormorant:- I used this report, it was one of several reported in the Region.

Rough-legged Hawk:- this documentation looked good and the record was among a number of May sightings. I used it.

Prairie Falcon:- Though I would have been more comfortable with the underwing pattern, I accepted Sac Co. bird.

Buff-br Sandpiper:- Remarkable record, I included it.

Red-necked Phalarope:- I did not use the Apr. 26 record

Iceland Gull:- Not good. Documentation fails to mention tertial pattern, which would help eliminate pale Thayer's or intergrade.

Black-headed Grosbeaks:- I did not use these. Descriptions of these females fall within the plumage range of spring female Rose-breasteds I have seen (bill color would have been helpful), and the possibility of hybrids was not considered. I am generally very skeptical of female Black-headed Grosbeak reports.

We had a late June Royal Tern at Michigan City Harbor. It was the state's first confirmed record.

Regards,

Ken Brock

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

96-24

What species? Black-headed Grosbeak How many? 1 ♀

Location? Warren Co. Conservation Board Headquarters

Type of Habitat? small deciduous trees

When? date(s): 5/12/96 time: 6:45 to 7:00 am.

Who? your name and address: Jim Sinclair, 810 North B St, Indiana

Others with you: David Youngblut

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.

Definately a Phœticus grosbeak. The breast was a warm buff color extending down the flanks. Streaking on the breast was scant, as with the streaking on the flanks. The bird easily stood out from the other ♀ grosbeaks which were present.

Similar species: how eliminated:

Several ♀ Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were present for comparison

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
viewing conditions good. Bird observed at 40 to 50 yds with 10x42 field glasses

Previous experience with species and similar ones:  
Have seen this species out west

References and persons consulted before writing description:  
A.G.S. Field Guide, Golden Guide plus observed a similar bird at Armstrongs on 5/15

How long before field notes made? at the time this form completed? 10 days

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