

Fish Crow
25 Apr 1994
s. of Kilpeck Landing, Louisa Co., IA
*McKay, *P. Petersen
IBL 64:77, 65:82, 66:97

Record Number: 94-14
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Kelly McKay, 6143 34th Ave., Moline, IL 61265 [19 Aug 1994, 8 Nov 1995]
Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport 52803 [19 Aug 1994]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:77
Records Committee: IBL 65:82; 66:97

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

NA, Difficult. One observer heard vocalizations but did not give detailed description, and other observer described bird but did not hear calls. Neither mentioned hearing double-note call that would be most distinct from call of Am. Crow. No Am. Crow present for comparison; I am uncertain as to how much a Common Grackle would afford a good comparison. Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds (Teres 1980 page 137) gives measurements which indicate considerable size overlap between Am. and Fish Crows. He also mentions more slender body and longer, more slender wings. In favor of this sighting is increasing northward movement of Fish Crows in recent years.

NA, I fear that I may be setting an impossibly high standard for non-specimen reports of this species, but I have a hard time bringing myself to accept something of this importance on one field mark, a call. Clearly, all other marks are subjective such as size and bill size, assuming there IS a difference in the latter. In support of this record, I think it is highly unlikely that this is an immature American Crow. While nesting has been reported from Iowa in late March, the interval from nest initiation to fledging makes it highly unlikely that this was a just-fledged American Crow. This report reminds me of an even stronger description (based on behavioral clues) by Tim Brush (as I recall) a year or two ago, which was also turned down by the committee. Dr. Brush's report was from this same approximate area. I have a lot of sympathy for this record, and feel it is very likely correct. On the Illinois Spring Bird Count this spring, I saw and heard what sounded like a fish crow near the Mississippi River near Nauvoo. For reasons noted above, I did not report it. With regard to Iowa reports, I hope the committee can come up with a workable criteria for dealing with future Fish Crow records.

NA, I think we should expect an occasional Fish Crow to move up the Mississippi River, but I am at a loss to know how best to "prove" those occurrences. The two characteristics noted -- size and voice -- are subjective criteria which are much more easily applied to known populations than to vagrants. The American Crows I see appear to come in a variety of sizes, deviating from the average to a considerable extent. The description of the call sounds good for Fish Crow and it is unfortunate the observers were not able to tape record this for analysis, especially since it was observed on four different occasions. Do we know for sure what the nesting cycle of the American Crow is so that we can definitely rule out a juvenile bird?

A-D, This is a very difficult species to identify. Visual identification alone seems to me to be wishful thinking. McKay's comparison of the sounds with the tape and previous experience, along with a previous sighting from the same area by an experienced observer tips the balance for me. We should reconsider the previous record and accept both or neither. The closest records are from Mason and Pike counties in IL and Pike County in MO. The Pike counties are opposite each other south of Hannibal. Mason Co. IL is south of Peoria on the IL R., just south of the level of the Iowa border.

NA, There is a size overlap between Fish and Am. Crow, size comparison given not reliable for this species. We have had records similar to this before and have had the same problem and voted them NA prior to this. I think we need to have recordings for the records committee or at least some idea if the range for Fish Crow is progressing up the Mississippi and getting anywhere close to Iowa. I have heard of several other people who have gone to look for this bird but could not find it again. This very well could be a good record for Fish Crow but I still have doubts.

A-D, Believable descriptions of a not unexpected species expanding range in Miss. Valley.

RE-VOTE (by mail 1995): 5 A-D, 2 NA

NA, Nothing has occurred that would convince me to change my vote on these two records (91-23 and 94-14) although this one is the more convincing of the two.

NA, Although Fish Crow may be present, why aren't there any sightings from other months besides late Apr and May? I am not sure juvenile Am Crow has been eliminated.

A-D, Although we do not yet have a recording of this species, multiple "sound" records over 4 years are enough to confirm that this species is present in Iowa.

A-D, Evidence is mounting on this species in southeast Iowa. This record could be taken as the first sighting of an incursion of this species into the state. The documentation does not specifically state that the bird was seen calling at the same time that it was in sight; in voting A-D I am presuming that that was the case.

A-D (as before).

RE-VOTE (by mail 1995): 6 A-D, 1 NA

A-D, Multiple sound identifications convince me that this bird has moved up the Mississippi Valley. Reports are limited to April-May because later dates preclude eliminating juvenile American Crows. ID based solely on size, however, is inconclusive.

A-D, These records hinge on call note. Should it have been two-noted.

A-D, McKay doc.

A-D, No change from my previous vote.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

94-14

What species? Fish Crow How many? 1
Location? Big Timber Unit of Hawk Trains National Wildlife Refuge approx. 2.0 miles downstream of Killeck landing. This landing is located 8.0 miles south of Muscatine, Ia. on County Road X61.
Type of Habitat? Bottomland Hardwood Forest
When? date(s): 4-25-'94; 5-2-'94; 5-4-'94, 5-19-94 time: 1000 ⁰⁴⁻²⁵ 10 1005
Who? your name and address: Kelly McKay 6143 34th Ave. Moline, IL, 6265
Others with you: Mike Bornsteins, USFWS
Others before or after you: ~~Mike Bornsteins~~ (Jerry White; Pete Petersen; Brian Blevins)

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.

We heard a nasal "cat" call which sounded to a nasal and high to be an American crow. The call was given 2-3 times. Next, the bird flew 75-100 meters in front of us calling as it flew. We saw the bird briefly before it disappeared into the forest. However, it continued calling 8-10 more times. Altogether we heard the bird 12-15 times.

The bird was all black, just like an American Crow, but seemed to be smaller than ~~the~~ the many American Crows at the site. The bird was in view for about 15 seconds.

When we returned to shore, we played the call on the Petersons Audio Cassette Tapes and it was the same call made by the bird we observed.

Similar species; how eliminated:

American Crow: different sounding calls; This bird was smaller than American Crows

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
It was partly cloudy (sun was not visible at the time) but bright. Therefore lighting was excellent. The bird was approx. 75-100 meters away (estimate)
Kipolta 10X42 wide angle binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:
Very experienced with ~~the~~ American Crows. I had seen many Fish Crows about 15 years ago on the North Carolina coast.

References and persons consulted before writing description:
National Geographic Field Guide
Petersons Cassette Tape of Bird Songs of Eastern/Central U.S.

How long before field notes made? 30 min. this form completed? 1 day

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

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

94-14

What species? Fish Crow How many? one

Location? Boat Ramp, Flaming Prairie Co. Park, Louisa Co.

Type of Habitat? Miss. River edge - timbered area

When? date(s): April 26, 1994 time: 3:00 to 3:02 PM CST

Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd. Danvers, I.A. 50805

Others with you: Brian Blevins

Others before or after you: Kelly McMay, Michael Bernstein, Gerry White

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.

Very small crow seen on a fallen tree over Miss. River, the bird being in Big Timber unit of Mark Twain N. W. R., very near the water. A Common Grackle was only a few meters away providing an excellent size comparison. The crow was perhaps 8cm longer than the grackle; plumage entirely glossy black, legs + bill black, (eyes) proportionally longer than for the Am. Crow. Bill much less massive than that of Am. Crow. The bird foraged on a branch partly in the water in a rather dainty manner. The very strong wind made it impossible to hear any vocalization. A slough prevented a closer approach.

Similar species; how eliminated: Am. Crow ^{it is} larger, shorter legs proportionally, much more massive bill, plumage less glossy.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment. Sun behind us est. range 120m, 10x40 Zeiss binocs.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen Fish Crows many times in the South very familiar with Am. Crow

References and persons consulted before writing description: Geo guide, Crows Jays by Madge + Burn.

How long before field notes made? 5 min. this form completed? 1 1/2 hrs.

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