

Western Tanager
25 Apr 1994

Record Number: 94-18
Classification: A-D

Swan L., Johnson Co., IA
*D. Dankert, *J. Fuller, *Kent
IBL 64:79;65:82, Dankert 1995

DOCUMENTATIONS

David L. Dankert, 806 15th Ave. SW #5, Cedar Rapids 52404 [19 Aug 1994*]
Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240 [19 Aug 1994]
Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:79
Records Committee: IBL 65:82
Dankert, D. L. 1995. Western Tanager in Eastern Iowa. IBL 65:21.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Although observation time was brief, presence of wing bars clinches ID.
A-D, Interesting -- Bob Myers and I saw one with Y R Warblers on Apr 26 -- in SW IA a few years ago! Coincidental!

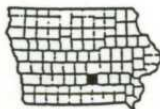
Sioux City; *Maridel Jackson (MJ), Ankeny; Ann M. Johnson (AMJ), Norwalk; Thomas N. Johnson (TNJ), Mystic; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Bob Livermore (BL), *Francis L. Moore (FLM), Waterloo; Sioux City; Babs K. Padelford and Loren J Padelford (BKP/LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Peter C. Petersen (PCP), Davenport; Don Pogensee (DP), Ida Grove; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; *W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; Dale Stone (DS), Lake City; Ed Thelen (ET), Spirit Lake; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Wendy VanDeWall (WV), Ankeny; *Harold W. White (HWW), Estherville; and Hank Zaletel, (HZ), Colo.

211 Richards Street, Iowa City, IA

LAUGHING GULLS AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE, ANN JOHNSON, AND MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 16 July 1991 Tim Schantz found a juvenile Laughing Gull at Red Rock Reservoir in Marion County. The bird was with a large flock of Ring-billed and Franklin's gulls at the Whitebreast Cove on the south side of the reservoir. On 6 August, Steve Dinsmore found another Laughing Gull, this one a second-summer bird, in the same area. Both birds remained in the area through at least 11 August. The following descriptions were written from our notes and detailed notes submitted by several other observers.



The juvenile bird was relatively easy to pick out from the other gulls by virtue of its body shape and dark appearance. With its long wing extension, it was just slightly shorter than the nearby Ring-billed Gulls, but its slimmer build and finer features gave it a generally smaller look. The head and neck were much more delicate, giving the bird more of a gentle "phalarope-look" as opposed to the "self-assured" perception of our more common gulls.

The overall color of the bird was dark brown. The bill was dark, about three fourths the length of the head, and showed an obvious gonys. Compared to a Franklin's Gull, this bird had a longer, thicker bill. The eye was dark, with faint white crescents above and below the eye. The head, neck, and breast were dark brown, except for a lighter area in the center of the breast and a pale area around the base of the bill. The belly and vent were white. The mantle was also dark brown, but darker than the breast. There was a small, light gray area on the upper mantle, probably an indication that the bird was molting into first-winter plumage. When perched, the wings appeared dark brown, gradually becoming black towards the wingtip. The wing coverts were edged in lighter feathers, creating a scalloped look. The wingtips extended well beyond the tail when the bird was perched. In flight, the primaries and secondaries were black and the wing coverts were dark brown. The underwing was white. Tail pattern was as follows: rump pale brown, white uppertail, and a broad, black terminal tail band. There was no evidence of the black hood typical of adult birds in basic plumage. The legs were black and nearly the length of those of a Ring-billed Gull. Separation from Franklin's Gull was based on size, longer wings, longer and more strongly hooked bill, proportionately longer legs, flatter crown, overall darker brown color, and wing and tail pattern.

The second-summer bird was with a large gull flock, mostly Ring-billed Gulls, but also included several Franklin's Gulls and the juvenile Laughing Gull. This bird was similar to the juvenile bird in size and structure. The bill was black, and of similar dimensions to the bill of the juvenile bird. The head, neck, underparts, and undertail were white, except for a pale gray area on the nape that almost connected the eyes. This bird also showed faint white eye crescents that were broken in front of and behind the eye. The mantle was dark gray, slightly darker than the mantle of a Ring-billed Gull. In flight, the outer primaries, and most of the inner ones, were black. The tail was white except for a black terminal band that was broken in the middle. The legs appeared dark. The bird was clearly in heavy molt, as evidenced by the worn flight feathers and rectrices. On the basis of these field marks, the bird was probably molting from second-summer to second-winter plumage.

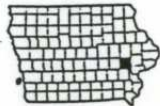
The Laughing Gulls were last seen together on 11 August. These are the fifth and sixth records of Laughing Gull for Iowa, all since 1989. The other records include single juvenile birds at Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County on 19-26 August 1989, Midwest Power Ponds, Pottawattamie County on 27 August 1989, and at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County on 15 July 1991, a juvenile and a second-winter bird north of Burlington, Des Moines County on 9 September 1989 (Kent, T. H. 1991. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:29-32, Bendorf and Kent 1991, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:83-87), and an adult in breeding plumage at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County on 13 April 1990 (Bendorf 1992 *Iowa Bird Life* 62:21-23). Based on these records, it seems that Laughing Gulls are more frequent vagrants to Iowa than previously thought. More thorough checks of gull flocks at the large reservoirs and along the Mississippi River in late summer might produce more sightings of this species.

4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames, IA 50014 (SJD), 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211 (AJ), and Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148 (MP)

WESTERN Tanager in Eastern Iowa

DAVID L. DANKERT

I arrived at Swan Lake at about 10:45 a.m. on 25 April 1994. Swan Lake is northwest of North Liberty in Johnson County and is in the Hawkeye Wildlife Area at Coralville Reservoir.



After viewing the lake for birds, I drove to the west end of the lake and found a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding in a small stand of trees. I also noticed a larger bird perched in the top of one of these trees. This bird was about 25 feet away and facing me. With the sun behind me providing good viewing conditions, I noted a brilliant red head and yellow breast, and knew that I was looking at a bird that was unusual in Iowa.

With my adrenaline flowing, I quickly trained my binoculars on the bird, absorbing any details that the strong, windy conditions would allow. I saw a red forehead, chin, and throat, and the red extended into the upper breast. The remainder of the underparts were yellow. Because the bird was directly facing me, I could not see the upper parts of its wings and body. After a brief but exciting eight to ten seconds, the bird took flight, dipped down behind the trees, and was gone.

Hurriedly, I checked my field guide, and soon realized that I had seen a male Western Tanager, but I felt that I needed another look at this bird. It was a life species for me, and I wanted to record as much information as possible, but a three-hour

search yielded nothing but exhaustion and unfortunately that "second look" would never come.

I contacted Jim Fuller, and he and Tom Kent went to the same area the next morning and relocated the bird. I also returned later that day and searched for the bird, but my search was brief and unsuccessful, due to a dust storm created by strong southerly winds.

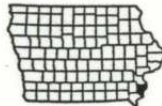
This sighting is the eleventh record for the state. Dating back to 1969 there are 10 previous records in Iowa: four from the western region of the state, three from the central, and three from the east. Seven of these previous records occurred in the spring, with two in the fall and one in the summer. It appears that this species could show up anywhere in Iowa, especially in the spring.

806 15th Ave SW #5, Cedar Rapids IA 52404

LARK BUNTING IN DES MOINES COUNTY

CHARLES FULLER

One of my favorite birding areas in Des Moines County is the wide agricultural belt that is east of Highway 99 and north of Burlington. This area includes four or five excellent vantage points where one can view the Mississippi River. On 30 April 1994, as I was making my rounds in the old floodplain and heading toward the river, I drove down my favorite road where, in most late winters and early springs, Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings can be found. This was a "B" level minimum maintenance road and was just dry enough to traverse without getting stuck. At a 90 degree turn in the road, there were two birds in the middle of the road, 30-40 feet from my car. The first was easily identified as a Vesper Sparrow, while the other got my immediate, undivided attention. The most conspicuous field mark was the large creamy-white wing patch (not bars). The bird in question was slightly larger than the nearby Vesper Sparrow and had a heavy sparrow-like bill. It had a slight, but readily apparent eye ring with a light stripe just above and through the eye. The breast was streaked, and the tail was slightly notched with a white-tipped end. The bird also had a very fine white outertail line. After observing the bird on the ground for nearly a full minute, it abruptly flew and possibly landed in a recently plowed field 0.2 mile away. My first impression of this bird was that I had found a female Lark Bunting, and the various field guides I consulted did nothing to change my mind. Although there are a number of previous records of Lark Buntings from western Iowa, there are few from eastern Iowa and none from Des Moines or other nearby southeastern Iowa counties.



It must be noted that on 29 April, the day before the sighting, a powerful front came through Iowa, ushering in strong northwest winds which gusted above 25 mph. I speculate that it was this weather disturbance that brought in this bird.

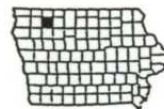
420 South Garfield, Burlington, IA 52601

94-18

CLARK'S GREBE IN CLAY COUNTY

MARION M. BREWER

During spring, I like to tour eastern Clay and western Palo Alto counties every week to see what birds I can find. One area I visit regularly is Trumbull Lake in Clay County. Over the past several years, it has been especially good for grebes. This spring proved no exception as I found Red-necked, Eared, and Western grebes there.



On 13 May 1994, I stopped at the boat access at the southwest corner of Trumbull Lake and scanned the lake. Among the birds on the lake were a pair of large grebes. One was clearly a Western Grebe while the other was a Clark's Grebe. The latter bird had a bright yellow bill which contrasted with the greenish-yellow bill of the Western Grebe. The lores region of the Clark's Grebe was white and the white coloration extended in front of, over, and behind the reddish-colored eye. The two grebes were preening and diving together while I watched them. I revisited the area on 19 May and saw one Clark's Grebe again in the same area but the Western Grebe was not present.

1537 560th Street, Cherokee, IA 51012

BOOK REVIEWS

A Guide to the Birding Areas of Missouri compiled by Kay Palmer. Audubon Society of Missouri. 1993, 179 pp., paperback \$10.00. Available from Kay Palmer, 15100 S. Clinkenbeard, Ashland, MO 65010. \$1.50 postage and handling. With the exception of Zimmerman and Patti's *A Guide to Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri*, no other book has been published on bird finding for the entire state of Missouri. This guide contains descriptions of areas from many contributors. As a result, writing styles vary. Many of the articles appeared in *The Bluebird* the society's official journal.

The guide breaks the state down into six regions. Each region averages 17 birding areas with the exception of the southwestern region which has 45. Directions are given to each area as well as short descriptions of the natural features, species that can be expected to be seen, and general information or restrictions. Maps are provided for 35 of the 128 areas described. Unfortunately, the quality is not uniform. Many have been reduced to such a degree that a magnifying glass is needed to read the print.

An index lists bird species and birding areas by county, state parks, and conservation areas. An annotated official state checklist is provided with the guide, but it could easily become separated from the book. Adding several pages to the book and reprinting the checklist could have easily solved the problem. There are not any individual species accounts; rather birds are classed by the habitats in which they could be found such as forest edge or shrubby fields. A bar graph time line of arrivals and departures would have been helpful as well as a listing of abundance status.

These limitations notwithstanding, those not familiar with Missouri birding areas will find this guide helpful. A final word of caution. The preface states that "due to the extreme flooding in 1993, conditions in birding areas along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers could be quite different from the way in which they have been described."—Hank Zaletel

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

94-18

What species? WESTERN Tanager How many? 1

Location? Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County

Type of Habitat? river bottomland

When? date(s): 25 April 1994 time: 10:50:00 AM to 10:50:08 AM

Who? your name and address: David L. Dankert 806 15th Ave SW #5 Cedar Rapids, IA 52404

Others with you: NONE

Others before or after you: James L. Fuller, Thomas H. Kent on the morning of 26 April 1994

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.

While viewing Yellow-rumped Warblers in a tree, I noticed a larger bird perched approximately 25 feet high in the top of the same tree. I immediately noticed the red head and yellow body. The bird was approximately the size of a European Starling.

The forehead, chin, and throat were red. The red extended slightly into the upper portion of the breast. The remaining breast was yellow. The belly was yellow. I could not see the upper parts of this bird including the wing pattern. I saw the bird in good light; the sun was behind me.

After viewing the bird for approximately 8 seconds, the bird took flight and the strong wind carried the flying bird away from me and ~~it~~ it disappeared immediately behind the tree line.

I tried to relocate the bird several times over the next 3 hours but was not successful. However, Jim Fuller told me that he and Thomas Kent did relocate the bird the following morning.

Similar species; how eliminated: NONE

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
Clear 45 feet (estimated) Leica 8x42 BA binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: None

References and persons consulted before writing description:
(Golden) Birds of North America (Petersen) Western Birds and Eastern Birds, (National Geographic Society) Birds of North America
JAME L. FULLER JEFF DANKERT

How long before field notes made? 3.5 hours this form completed? 2 days

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

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

1

SPECIES: Western Tanager (Male)

LOCATION: Small woodlot just north of the east end of Swan Lake (Johnson County)

DATE & TIME: 26 April, 1994 (7:45 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: The bird was discovered by David Dankert on 25 April. With me was Tom Kent.

BACKGROUND: David Dankert reported seeing a Western Tanager along the north side of Swan Lake the previous morning, but could not relocate it later in the day. Tom Kent and I searched the area where he had seen the bird without success, and were searching a small woodlot just east of that location, when a yellowish bird flew from the top of one tree to another. I was able to get my binoculars on it, and observed it for ten seconds or less, when it flew to another tree and was never relocated.

DESCRIPTION: The general size of the bird was greater than that of a House Sparrow and less than an American Robin. The following field marks were noted in that short time. It was a bright yellow color with a black back and tail. The top of the head was a bright red, but it did not extend very far down the neck....not as far as birds of this species that I have seen before. There were two prominent yellow wingbars.

SIMILAR SPECIES: A Scarlet Tanager coming into breeding plumage might have some blotchy red on a yellow-green body, but it does not have wingbars, and the red would not be so well limited to just the head.

OPTICS & CONDITIONS: It was early morning of a partly cloudy day, but it was extremely windy. I was looking toward the northwest with Swift Audubon 8.5 X 44 binoculars. Distance was about 40-50 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this species once previously in Iowa, and numerous times in the west.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes were written immediately upon returning to my office (15-20 minutes), and this report was typed on 28 April. No field guide was consulted before or after the observation.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Western Tanager; Number: 1 male

Location: near Swan Lake, Johnson Co., IA

Date: 27 Apr 1994; Time: 7:45 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: found by David Dankert on 26 Apr.; Jim Fuller with me. Not seen later.

Habitat and circumstances: in deciduous trees along roadway next to woods.

Description of bird: Jim spotted the bird in a lone, medium-sized tree between the road and open field. I got on it quickly and saw a bird that was the size and shape of a tanager. It had a yellow (plain yellow) body and head, black wings with wing bar (white or yellow, I wasn't sure), and orange on top and back of head. The orange was not sharply demarcated. I did not appreciate the tail color. After a few seconds (less than 30), the bird flew across the road into a larger tree that was already partially leafed out. Although we watched the bird fly into this tree, we never saw it again, nor did others who looked for it all day.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: A male Scarlet Tanager in basic plumage would not have orange on the head or a wing bar. Otherwise, this bird is distinctive. It appeared to not have quite finished molting or wearing to full alternate plumage.

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: mostly shade on west side of grove; Distance: about 30 feet; Optics: 10x binocular.

Previous experience: have seen many in west

References before/after viewing: none before notes; later checked on color of wing bars and extent of orange on head in alternate male.

Time of notes: after failing to locate bird in leafy tree; Final typing: 2 days.