

Mountain Bluebird

4 Mar 1989

Lake Anita S.P., Cass Co., IA

\*Myers, \*S.Dinsmore, \*Johnson, \*Fuller

also 7, 9, 10 March; IBL 59:83, 61:85, Steffens/Johnson 1991

Record Number: 89-16

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Bob Myers, 7 Mar

Steve Dinsmore, 7 Mar

Ann Johnson, 9 Mar

Jim Fuller, 10 Mar

PHOTOGRAPH

Doug Rose, 16 March, P-0360

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:83.

Photograph: IBL 61:119 (Steffens)

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Steffens, S., and R. Johnson. 1991. Mountain Bluebirds at Lake Anita State Park. IBL 61:119-120.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D. Good descriptions of up to 8 Mountain Bluebirds, possibly a family group.

A-D. All documentations eliminate any other species. Excellent set of documentations.

A-D. Descriptions adequate to confirm ID.

REVOTE (29 Jul 1990): A-P

SENT TO: Bob Myers, RR2, Box 153, Perry, IA 50220; Steve Dinsmore; Ann Johnson, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211; Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, RR6, Iowa City, IA

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** A young bird was seen being fed by a Northern Cardinal in Iowa City on 20-21 Jul (DRP)

**Orchard Oriole:** 1-4 were found in Cerro Gordo, Fremont, and Kossuth (2 broods) counties.

**House Finch:** 1 received few reports, perhaps an indication of the abundance of this species. They nested in Rippey, Greene Co. (SRL).

**Red Crossbill:** 2 were reported at Boone on 5 Jun (Lois Selil fide JJD) and a female was at the 4-H camp near Luther, Boone Co. on 22 Jun (Jim Pease fide JJD, details)

## CONTRIBUTORS-SUMMER 1991

\*=documentation only

Carol A. Alexander (CAA), Fairfield; Pam Allen/Reid Allen (PA/ReA), West Des Moines; Eloise Armstrong/Eugene Armstrong (EIA/EuA), Booneville; Ann Barker (ABa), Princeton; Neil Bernstein (NBe), Cedar Rapids; Dick Bierman (DBi), Cherokee; \*Becky Boggess (BBo), Iowa City; Dennis Carter (DC), Decorah; Robert I. Cecil (RIC), Des Moines; Anne Crane (AC), Clive; Fred Crane (FC), Clive; James J. Dinsmore (JJD), Ames; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Ames; Bery Engebretsen (BE), Des Moines; James L. Fuller (JLF), Iowa City; Rita Goranson (RGo), Mason City; L. Paul Hertzell (LPH), Ames; Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City, NE; Laura S. Jackson (LSJ), Madrid; Ann M. Johnson (AMJ), Norwalk; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Darwin Koenig (DK), Ames; Sharon R. Laub (SRL), Rippey; Darwin D. Mosman (DDM), Elkhart; Babs K. Padelford/Loren J. Padelford (BKP/LJP), Bellevue, NE; Marietta A. Petersen (MAP), Walnut; Mary Lou Petersen/Peter C. Petersen (MLP/PCP), Davenport; D. Randall Pinkston (DRP), Iowa City; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; Douglas L. Rose (DLR), Glenwood; \*Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; Sue J. Spieker (SJS), Norwalk; Dan Varland (DV), Ames; Jan L. Walter (JLW), Mason City; Hank Zaletel (HZ), Colo.

## COMMENT

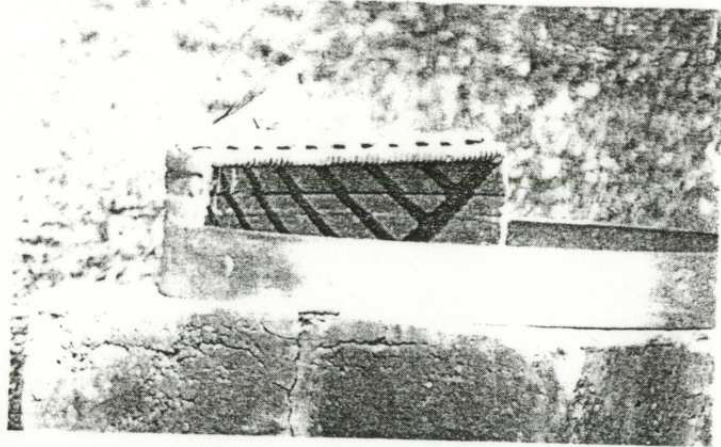
The latest "fad" in conservation circles is concern for a number of species, mostly songbirds, that nest in North America and winter in Central or South America. Many of these "neotropical migrants" are forest dwellers although technically the group includes Dickcissel, Upland Sandpiper, and both cuckoos. For the last several years I have tried to include here information on a number of these species that nest in Iowa. From my perspective, several of these species seem somewhat less common now than a few years ago. These include Wood Thrush, Veery, Cerulean Warbler, and Orchard Oriole. Tell me what you think in your report next summer. Some of us in Iowa hope that by then there will be a more systematic way available to survey these species.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50010

## MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS AT LAKE ANITA STATE PARK

SHARON STEFFENS AND RON JOHNSON

On 4 March 1989, we drove to Lake Anita State Park near Anita in northeastern Cass County to see if any Eastern Bluebirds had returned to the area. While searching the scattered trees near the emergency spillway at the southwest arm of the lake, we were surprised to find a flock of about 25 Mountain Bluebirds. With their deep blue upperparts and light blue-gray undersides, the birds were easily identified. We had a video camera with us and were able to get some footage of the birds. The next day we returned to the park and were able to find only eight birds by the spillway but found a single bird at the picnic area near the main dam. That evening we called the Iowa Bird Line to report our find. A few days later we found only six birds, and on 11 March we could find only four birds. We last saw the Mountain Bluebirds on 22 March when we saw three together. We also saw our first Eastern Bluebirds on that date. Numerous other birders visited the park and saw the Mountain Bluebirds with the last report being on 24 March (*IBL* 59:83).



Mountain Bluebird at Lake Anita State Park, 4 March 1989. Photograph by Sharon Steffens

This is the fifth accepted record on Mountain Bluebirds in Iowa (Dinsmore et al. 1984, Livingston 1985, *IBL* 55:28-29) and a sixth was recorded later in March 1989 (Thelen 1989). By month the other birds were found in March (2 records), April (2 records), and December-February. This is the only record to involve more than a single bird, and the occurrence of a flock of 25 birds is unprecedented for Iowa or other Midwestern states. Since bluebirds commonly migrate in flocks, it seems reasonable to assume that these birds became disoriented during migration and wandered to Iowa.

89-16



## LITERATURE CITED

- Dinsmore, J. J., T. H. Kent, D. Koenig, P. C. Petersen, and D. M. Roosa. 1984. Iowa Birds. Iowa State Univ. Press, Ames. 356 pp.
- Livingston, J. R. 1985. Mountain Bluebird in Decatur County. Iowa Bird Life 55:19-20.
- Thelen, E. 1989. Mountain Bluebird in Palo Alto County. Iowa Bird Life 59:124.

1800 Sycamore, Atlantic, IA 50022

## LONG-BILLED CURLEW IN POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

W. ROSS SILCOCK

On 4 July 1990, I visited the Iowa Power and Light (IPL) ponds in extreme southwestern Pottawattamie County. Very few birds were present, most notably the resident Piping Plovers, but my attention was drawn to a large shorebird preening near the water's edge. Closer examination by telescope showed that the bird had a very long decurved bill, no head stripes overall evenly and finely barred brownish-gray plumage, and long bluish legs. During preening, the wings were often extended to exhibit diagnostic cinnamon wing linings. These features identified the bird as a Long-billed Curlew, a conclusion concurred with by Tanya Bray, who arrived soon after I did and also saw this bird. It did not stay long, however, allowing a total viewing time of only about 20 minutes. The Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union has accepted this record.

This is only the third record of this species in Iowa in the last 50 years. Carl Priebe observed one with a Marbled Godwit at the Riverton area in Fremont County 11 April 1989 (Priebe 1990), and one collected 12 November 1968 in Emmet County is now in the Iowa State University collection (Priebe 1990).

Long-billed Curlew breeds throughout the interior western United States and adjacent Canada in its preferred habitat of moist grasslands. Populations on the high plains sections of the Great Plains are doing well, but populations further east are not. The species has not bred for many years in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois (Johnsgard 1981). The most easterly populations still doing well are in the Nebraska Sandhills, western South Dakota, and southwestern Kansas.

Considering the disappearance of eastern breeding populations, the paucity of records of migrants in Iowa is not surprising. Most Great Plains long-bills presumably migrate west of Iowa to their wintering grounds in interior Texas and the western Gulf Coast. Also strong flyers like Long-billed Curlew probably are non-stop migrants. It is also possible that the very few recent records east of the current breeding and wintering ranges are referable to the very small population which winters on the southern Atlantic Coast.

The three Iowa records cited above illustrate the timing pattern of this species' migration. Spring migration occurs in April and early May, with most egg laying in May and June (Johnsgard 1979). The 11 April 1989 Fremont County record appears to have been an off-course spring migrant. As in many North American shorebirds, fall migration timing differs by age-class (with varying amounts of overlap). Females abandon the young when the latter are two or three weeks old, leaving the males to



care for the brood (Johnsgard 1981). The Eurasian counterpart, the Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), considered part of a superspecies with *N. americana* (Mayr and Short, 1970), shows similar behavior. Females leave the brood to the males 10-20 days after the young hatch and join other females to migrate (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Given egg dates as early as 1 May in South Dakota (South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991) and 3 May in Saskatchewan (Bent 1928), and an incubation period of about 28 days (Johnsgard 1979), the 4 July bird in Pottawattamie County was probably a female which laid eggs in late May, close to the peak laying date for the species, and thus not at all unusual as a date of occurrence for a migrating female. The Emmet County record probably is of a very late juvenile migrant, the last age class to migrate. Such late dates (those in October and November) are unusual, and probably indicate a tendency for juveniles to disperse before migrating south. Most migration to wintering areas takes place in August and September. Indeed, all birds have left the Nebraska breeding grounds by early August (Johnsgard 1979).

## LITERATURE CITED

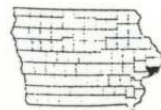
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- Cramp, S., and K. E. L. Simmons (eds.). 1983. Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, vol. 3. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford. 913 pp.
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- Mayr, E., and L. L. Short. 1970. Species Taxa of North American Birds. Publ. Nuttall Ornithol. Club 9, 127 pp.
- Priebe, C. 1990. Long-billed Curlew in southwestern Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 60:20.
- South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. 1991. The Birds of South Dakota, 2nd ed. South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. Aberdeen, SD. 411 pp.

P. O. Box 300, Tabor, IA 51653

## CALIFORNIA GULL AT DAVENPORT, FIRST ACCEPTED IOWA RECORD

PETER C. PETERSEN

On Thanksgiving afternoon, 23 November 1989, Louise Augustine of Peoria, one of Illinois' top birders, called to say she had just seen a California Gull on the ice at Credit Island harbor in west Davenport. Mary Lou and I hastened to South Concord Street which provides an unobstructed view of the harbor. We located the bird standing on the ice at 4:25 p.m. It was intermediate in size between Herring and Ring-billed gulls which were standing with the California. We noted the head and body were white with some brown streaking on the head. The bill was yellow with a small dark area near the tip of the lower mandible. The legs were gray green. The mantle was slightly darker than nearby Herring Gull mantles. The head was very rounded, but eye color could not be determined. We observed the



91-68



89-16

Mountain Bluebird  
Lake Anita S.P.  
3-16-89  
Doug Rose

Mountain Bluebird P-0360  
Lake Anita, Cass Co., IA  
16 Mar 1989 Doug Rose



What species? Mountain Bluebird How many? 7 (3♂ + 4♀)Location? Lake Anita State ParkType of habitat? Hilly, grassy lake shore with <sup>red</sup> cedarWhen? date(s): March 7, 1989 time: 10:00am to 10:30amWho? your name and address: Bob Myers, RR2, Box 153 Perry, Iowa 50220others with you: Gene + Eloise Armstrongothers before or after you: Gene + Eloise were also there the day before

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.

The males were unmistakable. Typical bluebird size and shape but their wings, back, head, and dorsal tail were a brilliant <sup>sh</sup>blue (somewhat lighter than Eastern Bluebird). The ♂'s undersides were also blue but <sup>more</sup>pale than above. Belly was whitish. Eyes, feet, and bill appeared black. The ♀'s were much, much paler than the ♂'s. They were more brown-gray with a little bluish thrown in - especially on the wings and tail. Their throat was grayish and a very hint of chestnut (reddish) could be detected on at least one ♀'s breast.

Similar species and how eliminated: Eastern bluebird would show reddish on throat and breast. Western bluebirds would be darker and also have chestnut on breast.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

Bright overcast. Dist. = 20yd. closest used 10x40 Lietz binocs. and KOWA scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Saw one in Iowa several years back and quite a few out west.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NoneHow long before field notes made? none made this form completed? 1 week

MAIL TO: <sup>Spring</sup> F. I. ~~Myers~~, Field Reports Editor, ~~RR2, Box 153, Perry, IA 50220~~ IA ~~50220~~  
 Bob Myers RR2, Box 153, Perry, IA 50220

## DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Mountain Bluebird  
 How Many? 7 (3 males, 4 females or imm.)  
 Location? Lake Anita S.P., Cass Co.

Habitat? feeding in cedar trees near small lake.

Date? 9 Mar 1989

Time? 3:44-4:27 p.m.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames

Others who saw bird: J. Dinsmore, P. Hertzell, m.ob.

Description of bird: After a long search along the south side of the lake, we finally located some bluebirds feeding in a small patch of cedars. These birds had the typical stocky, short-tailed appearance of a bluebird. Three of the birds (males) were bright turquoise blue on the head, neck, throat, back, wings, rump, and tail. The underparts were off white. The bill was somewhat short and dark. The birds flew with a typical stiff-winged, bobbing bluebird flight. The other four birds (females or imm.) were paler than the males, with dull blue-gray color on the upperparts. The underparts of these birds were a bit grayer than those of the males. On several occasions, one or more of the birds gave a nasal "chew" in flight. A couple of the males would also give a longer warbler when perched. I suspect that these birds may have been a family group.

Similar species and how eliminated: The turquoise blue color on the upperparts (muted in the females or imm.), whitish underparts, shape, and flight pattern should eliminate other blue birds.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were good with the sun behind us. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 30 yards. I used Bushnell 8x35 binoculars and a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen many Mountain Bluebirds in the western U.S. I am also familiar with Eastern Bluebirds.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? written immediately after sighting.

How long before this form was completed? 5 hours



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-16

Species: Mountain Bluebird

Location: Lake Anita State Park, Cass County, IA

Habitat: Mixed transition woods and field edge with lake

Date(s): 3/9/89; 3/24/89

Time: 4:15 pm to 4:30 pm  
9:25 am to 9:30 am

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: Beth Brown, Osceola, on 3/9/89

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 behavior and voice.

These birds were the same size as Eastern Bluebirds and were in fact with Easterns both times I observed them. The males were a brilliant sky blue above with the underparts a bit paler edging to white on the belly and undertail coverts. The females were more of a grayish-brown with tinges of light blue on the wings and tail. The underparts were very light colored. The birds all had dark eyes and thin dark bills. The flock on 3/9/89 were giving call notes as they milled around. Eight birds were observed on 9 March of which I believe five were males. On 24 March I found only one pair.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Eastern and Western Bluebirds eliminated because of lack of rust on the breast; Townsend's Solitaire eliminated because of no wing patch, no white outer tail feathers and belly whiter on females; Blue Grosbeak/ Indigo Bunting eliminated by lighter blue, thinner bill and size/shape differences

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

Good light on 9 March; fair to good on 24 March. The birds were observed the first time at 50-100 yards through 7x26 binoculars and scope at 30x. The second time they were seen only through binocs at about 100'.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Species seen many times in the western mountains.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

None prior to field notes. Peterson consulted prior to writing documentation.

How long before field notes made? 6 hours How long before this form completed? 1 month



What species? MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD How many? 7Location? LAKE ANITA STATE PARKType of habitat? GRASS + A FEW SAPLINGSWhen? date(s): NO MARCH time: 7:35 to 7:50 AMWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, RR#6, IOWA CITY

others with you: \_\_\_\_\_

others before or after you: MOB

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.

SEVEN BIRDS WERE OBSERVED NEAR THE FROZEN LAKE (3 MALES AND 4 FEMALES) THEY WERE SITTING IN SAPLINGS, FLYING TO THE GRASS AND FEEDING ON THE GROUND. THERE WERE 2 EASTERN BLUEBIRDS WITH THEM. THEY WERE THE SAME SIZE AND SHAPE AS THE EASTERN BLUEBIRDS. THE MALES WERE A SKY BLUE COLOR ON THE HEAD, BACK, WINGS, AND TAIL, WITH THE WINGS AND TAIL A LITTLE DARKER BLUE. THROAT WAS A WHITE TO GRAYISH-BLUE AND UNDERPARTS WERE ALSO LIGHT BLUE. BILL WAS DARK AND <sup>LENGTH</sup> ABOUT 1/3 OF HEAD WIDTH. EYE & FEET WERE DARK. THERE WAS NO ORANGE ON BODY. THERE WAS A FAINT EYE RING. THE FEMALES HAD GRAY-BLUE WINGS, OTHERWISE WERE A GRAY-BROWN ON HEAD & UNDERPARTS. TWO OF THE FEMALES SHOWED A VERY BRIGHT BLUE PATCH ON THE FOLDED WING. ALSO HAD AN EYE RING, WHICH WAS MORE EASILY VISIBLE & LIGHTER.

Similar species and how eliminated: EASTERN & WESTERN BLUEBIRDS - BOTH SEXES SHOW ORANGE ON BREAST.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

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

CLEAR, EARLY MORNING LOOKING TOWARD SW WITH SUN IN EAST  
9X36 BINOCULARS. SEEN AT 40-75 FEET.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: SEEN OFTEN IN THE WEST AND ONCE NEAR LAMONI, IOWA

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATE this form completed? 12 HOURS

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240