

Van Dyk

Documentation of Sight record

- Species: Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)
- Number: one individual
- Location: East Lawn cemetery, Sheldon (extreme western O'Brien Co.), Iowa. This cemetery covers an extensive area and is planted with many large evergreens, viz., spruce (mostly Norway Spruce), pine (Austrian Pine, I think), and a species of cedar or juniper (I am not sure of the species; it resembles the Red Cedar of the East somewhat, but has a more open crown); these junipers carry many blue berries.
- Date: February 3, 1979
- Time bird seen: 2.15 - 2.45 p.m., about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour of leisurely observation.
- Description: a trim bird, considerably smaller and slimmer than the Blue Jays which were present in the area; head and underparts evenly colored darkish gray, chin slightly lighter; relatively short, dark bill; very distinctive eye ring; tannish wing bars in buffy wing patch; tail with white outer tail feathers; underside of tail white with black in middle (not unlike an over-sized version of the underside of tail of Black-tailed Gnatcatcher which I saw in southern California 3 weeks ago); in flight the wings show lighter wing patches.
- Behavior: I first noticed the bird as it was feeding on the berries of the juniper/cedar trees. It would flit to the end of a branch and, fluttering in "fly-catching" or "hummingbird" style, feed, then return to a branch, apparently to rest, while it would fluff its feathers a bit (the temperature was one below zero F.). The bird was not shy and allowed a close approach.
- Habitat: among evergreens, moving from tree to tree, selecting mostly the juniper/cedar trees, see above: Location.
- Elimination of similarly-appearing species: one who knows neither the Solitaire nor the Mockingbird might conceivably mistake it for the latter. But the Mockingbird is larger, has no eye ring, shows no buff on the wing, and flashes conspicuous white in wing and tail in flight. I have lived both in California and in southern New York, where the Mockingbird is common: I am very familiar with the Mockingbird.
- Distance: I followed the bird from tree to tree; it allowed me to approach to within an estimated 20 feet.
- Optical equipment: 8x40 binoculars
- Light: it was a beautifully sunny day, but cold (-1 F.), little wind. The bird was in a perfect position, as I stayed to the south-west of its movements, so I had the sun behind me.

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- Previous experience: on previous occasions I have made detailed observations of Townsend's Solitaires in the Black Hills, South Dakota, and in central Colorado. As indicated above, I am fully familiar with the Mockingbird, having lived in California and in southern New York, where it is common. As far as my general experience with birds is concerned, I have observed and identified some 520 species of birds in North America, and another 100 in Europe.
- Other observers: none
- Books consulted: I had no field guides with me at the time of the observation. Since I am familiar with the field marks of the Townsend's Solitaire, books did not influence my description.
- Time of writing description: I wrote this description immediately upon returning from Sheldon to my home in Sioux Center, about one hour after the actual observation.

Description written February 3, 1979  
typed February 11, 1979



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