

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)

Location: Lake Ahquabi SP, Warren Co., IA

Date: 13 April 1997 **Time:** 2:45 pm **Length of observation:** About one hour

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211

Other observers: Aaron Brees

Background: The bird was discovered yesterday by Jim Sinclair. I went out looking for it in the afternoon and thought I heard it sing. Since I never saw the bird, I went back this afternoon and was finally successful. It was about fifty feet from the trailhead across from the restrooms.

When I called David Youngblut to report the bird, he said he had seen what he was sure was a Townsend's Solitaire about a month ago in the vicinity. He turned his vehicle around and was unable to relocate it.

Viewing conditions (light, distance, optics): It was a bright, sunny day. I observed the bird at nearly every angle through 7X42 Zeiss binoculars and a Kowa 824 scope. At its closest, the bird was about thirty feet away and was out in the open.

Description of bird: This gray bird was about Eastern Bluebird size and had a dark eye with a conspicuous white eye ring. The bill was black and fairly small. Most of the bird was pretty unremarkably gray, although the greater wing coverts had a bit of off-white to the edges as did the scapulars. The primaries were slate gray.

The tail was mostly black. From above the outer edges were white but I did not see the bird fly any distance. As it was perched, I had good looks of the underside of the tail. It showed a lot of white. The central part of the tail appeared to be black, although the outer whiter retices folded beneath the darker central feathers. R6 and R5 had a white outer web while most of the inner web looked black with the exception of the tip. The white tip extended further toward the base of the tail on R6.

The undertail coverts were a bit paler than the rest of the bird and in some light looked nearly white.

The bird was feeding on juniper berries. Behavior was flycatcher-like as it snatched a berry and then perched on a bare branch. For awhile I thought that there was another bird in back of this one as I could hear the warbling song of a solitaire from what appeared to be another fifty feet behind this bird. I put the scope on the bird as I listened to the song. The bill never opened but the throat showed just a tiny movement. When Aaron arrived, we went to opposite sides of the bird and ascertained that this individual was indeed a master at ventriloquism. This trait is mentioned in Pough.

Similar species/discussion: Female bluebirds are similar in size and structure and have similar eye rings. The lack of any blue on the wings and tail and the presence of white outer tail feathers eliminates all bluebirds.

Previous experience: I have seen this species twice previously in Iowa and on numerous occasions in the west, most recently this past January.

References consulted:

1987. Field Guide to the Birds of North America, 2nd Edition. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.

Pough, Richard H. 1953. Audubon Guides, All the Birds of Eastern and Central North America. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.