

Lesser Goldfinch  
16 Jan 1964  
Sioux City, Woodbury Co., IA  
\*Mr. and Mrs. Darrell M. Hanna  
IBL 58:74, Hanna and Hanna 1964

Record Number: 87-AA  
Classification: NA

## LETTER

Daryl/Park Hanna to Pete and Mary Lou [Petersen], 5 Nov 1987

## REFERENCE

Hanna, D.M, and Mrs. D.M. Hanna. 1964. Lesser Goldfinch at  
Sioux City. South Dakota Bird Notes 16:102-103.

Records Committee: IBL 58:74

VOTE: 2-III, 1-IV, 3-V, 1-VI

V. This species is accidental in Nebraska with only one May record in 1984. Therefore, the likelihood of this species in Iowa is very small. If these were Lesser Goldfinch, the description of "dark greenish back, rump, and tail ..." would seem to make them both females. The easternmost forms of the males are usually black-backed, not greenish. And the immature would probably have a blackish cap. Several features mentioned do fit Lesser better than American Goldfinch, i.e. "fairly dark bill"; "dark legs and feet"; and the dark greenish color. Several troublesome features include the long horizontal white wing bar. One might expect Lessers studied at this close range to exhibit more of a white wing patch at the base of the primaries and not just a wing bar. I am sure that at the time, these observers might have seen something that convinced them that these were Lesser Goldfinches (at least according to the old Peterson). But there is just not quite enough distinctive in the written description to rule out the possibility of a couple of odd winter American Goldfinches. The species must be convincingly documented, not just suggestively described.

VI. The gray-white breast and light undertail appear to exclude Lesser Goldfinch. I can't find anything in the description that favors the identification. The species is extremely unlikely--1 record for NW Nebraska, 1 undocumented record for South Dakota, not seen in Kansas.

IV. Some ID points tend to suggest Lesser Goldfinch but others tend to discount this species. Were they all females? No black on head. First indication of size and a lot of marks point to American Goldfinch. I am not convinced that these were Lesser Goldfinches.

V. I don't have enough information to make judgement. In some ways the birds sound like American Goldfinches. Why weren't they compared directly to American Goldfinches? Other marks that would have helped include (1) presence of white wing patch at base of primaries, (2) color of undertail coverts, and (3) placement of white spots in tail.

V. After checking references of 1964, E. & W. Peterson guides, I am not convinced they were not American Goldfinches. The guides of that period do not illustrate winter plumage of Am. Goldfinch. The birds were seen after going to roost, probably the light level was poor. Size actually about 4 1/2" for Am. Goldfinch,

under 4" for Lesser. I wrote to Hannas for an explanation of why a bird known to be new for Iowa wasn't reported to IBL.

III. Description very good. Acceptable for first state record because of very good accompanying discussion of field marks, rarity, etc. Observers aware of first state record status. How did we miss this record?

III. Seems likely these are a strongly patterned female and a male green-phase Lesser Goldfinch. Either that or some escape native to another continent. The more serious question I have is--could they be escaped Lesser Goldfinches? They allowed quite close approach. Of course, when birds bed down for the night this is possible.

87-4A  
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**LESSER GOLDFINCH AT SIOUX CITY, IOWA**—Mrs. Edward Rogers, 2812 South Mulberry St. reported seeing some birds in her yard that were strange to her and invited us to come and see them. She said they usually appeared toward the latter part of the afternoon, and more often on bright days when they were also more active, flitting and darting among the shrubs and trees. But she has never seen them eat at the bird feeder nor drink or bathe at the electrically heated bird bath.

My husband and I went to the Rogers residence Thursday afternoon, January 16. Two birds had arrived and had gone to roost in a low vine and were perched about eight feet above the ground. Mrs. Rogers does not know the name of the vine, but the leaves were similar in size and shape to those of the American Elm. The birds tucked themselves in among the leaves which afforded them considerable protection. We had been there only a short time when Mr. Herrold Asmussen, biology teacher at Central High School in Sioux City, joined us. The birds allowed us to come within six feet of them or less so we could observe them both with and without binoculars. The following marks of identification were noted: about five inches long, fairly dark finch-shaped bill, dark eyes, legs and feet, dark greenish back, rump and tail, notched tail, blackish wings with long horizontal white wing bar and white-edged primaries. The face and throat were a yellowish color, breast a grayish-white with a distinct line separating the throat and breast of the one bird. The face of the other bird was not so yellow nor was the line between the throat and breast so distinct. The tail was light underneath. After studying Peterson's Bird Guides, the three of us determined the birds to be the lesser goldfinch.

Mrs. Rogers told us that the birds (at least four) started coming to her yard some time in the fall and came quite regularly until January 18 when she saw them for the last time this winter. By then, the leaves on the vine were curled quite tightly no longer affording the protection they once had. This may be the reason they no longer use the vine for a roost. She believes that this same flock of birds were in her yard and roosting in the same vine for about the same period of time during the winter of 1962-1963.

This bird is normally seen in the western and southwestern part of the United States and as far as we have been able to determine, has never before been recorded in the state of Iowa. Mr. Chilson believes the bird has been in this area before, but just has not been observed and reported. Mrs. Rogers' statement would tend to bear out his belief.

Since this bird is so very obviously outside of its normal range, we were quite hesitant about naming it the lesser goldfinch, but with all our study, we just couldn't come up with anything else. What bothers me, though, is the fact that the breast and face markings aren't just exactly as pictured and described in Peterson's guides. It doesn't show such a yellow face as the one bird had nor does it show any distinct line between the throat and breast. Other than that, everything else fits neatly into place—except we missed it a little on the size, according to the book. This description is just exactly as we noted it before we studied the description as given by Peterson.

I am so very glad that Mr. Asmussen was there at the same time and we could all study the birds at the same time. He has quite an intensive study of ornithol-

ogy in his high school biology course and is very careful in his observations.

We know, of course, that the birds had another roosting place the nights that they did not spend at the Rogers yard, and perhaps they are still around here some place, but until a competent observer notices them, we have no way of locating them again. Mrs. Rogers will call us whenever the birds reappear in her yard.—Mr. and Mrs. Darrell M. Hanna, 1026 S. Alice St., Sioux City, Iowa.

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**OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER AT OSCEOLA LAKE**—Late in the afternoon of August 16, 1964, Lucille, Miss Blanche Battin, and I were at Osceola Lake, some 18 miles northeast of Huron.

Among the several flycatchers observed was one unfamiliar to us. Seen several times in the course of an hour, always near the top of a high, dead limb, it could be studied at leisure with 7x50 binoculars in good light at distances of less than a hundred feet.

The beak and head were relatively heavier and larger than the other flycatchers seen, even the eastern kingbird of which several were also present in the area. The sides of its underparts were dark, being marked with a complex pattern that gave a gray appearance. The throat was very light and its lack of color continued down the front of the bird in a vague band that separated the dark areas on each side. There were no wing-bars.

By now we had decided this must be the Olive-sided Flycatcher and looked for the white spots on the sides of the back. They were not visible while the bird was perched or, for a time, while it was in the air after insects. But later we had a view of its back while

it was in the air and found the spots clearly visible though not so brightly conspicuous as shown in the usual pictures.

Accordingly we believe there can be no doubt that this bird is properly identified as an Olive-sided Flycatcher, presumably on migration.—J. W. Johnson, Huron.

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**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER AT OSCEOLA LAKE**—October 11, 1964, clear and still after the wind of the day before, showed few visible species of birds in this area. A migrating flock of robins stopped to water, bathe, and stoke up on the hackberries and a lingering of Harris' Sparrows nearly completed the list.

As we ate our lunch at a favorite picnic table, I called a junco flying into the dark brush—with a couple of white spots on each wing. For a few minutes we speculated on the too remote possibility of a White-winged Junco being here and tried to remember the areas of white on that species.

Then I saw a small bird moving about in the same area and went closer to see. Even in a shadow its back had a bluish sheen and I knew we had something unusual. A little closer, while the bird moved into better light, and it was clearly a Black-throated Blue Warbler. Even if it is only the second one I have ever seen, I had no doubt about it.

The bird moved about a group area of small trees for some ten minutes and was clearly seen and identified with certainty by Mrs. Hubert Kettle, Mary Aberdeen Kettle, and Lucille Johnson as well as myself. It was identically as pictured in all the books; the male Black-throated Blue Warbler.—J. W. Johnson, Huron.

25115 Kirby #11  
 Nemet, Ca. 92343  
 Nov. 5, 1987

Dear Pete + Mary Lou,

It was so good to hear from you and learn a little bit of what you have been doing. We miss our Iowa birding friends. We had some very enjoyable times with them and after wonder about the different ones.

Yes, I remember very well the time + place we saw the Lesser Goldfinches. That was a long time ago but it seems only recently. It made a deep impression on me I guess.

Now to answer your questions. As to why I didn't report it, I don't really remember. I have some alibis but they serve no useful purpose. I do recall that I had many conversations about birds with Bill Felton and I would guess that he was the one who notified the S. D. Bird Notes editor. He was a resident of S.D. and knew many S.D. birders.

And the second question - no, no photograph was made of the birds. We didn't have a good enough camera at that time. Mrs. Rogers didn't have one either. The birds were there for a couple of days.

I'll have to tell you of another record of mine. The Cattle Egret in Minn. It was written up in The Flicker Vol. 31 #3 September 1959 p. 103. That was a thriller for me too. It was a Cattle Egret for sure. I've seen many, many of them since. In fact we see them regularly within 15 mi. of our present home. But in '59 I had never seen one - nor was one pictured or described in any of the bird books I had. Gr. Breckanridge suggested that I

Write it up send it to the editor of the Fluker.

87A-A

We moved here in 1978 and shortly thereafter we joined the San Bernardino Valley Custodon Society. It has always been a large club but after the Revenue Supt. departed they all joined the San B. Club. They are continually getting new members so they have a large membership now. I hesitate to say how many. We have tremendous partnership developing with Talent - very active in both funding education & conservation projects. We aren't as active as we used to be but still go on some of the field trips. We are not going on in the "green" field trip to the Sycamore Area in summer - sometimes up to 120. But we have made some of the Sea Trips in winter. They have a full trip to Morse Bay that lasts about 400 mi. north & often hot weather.

You are no doubt familiar with the San Bernardino County Museum. I guess the finest collector of mountain birds & bird nests & eggs in the U.S. The head of that dept. is our field trip leader (one of them).

We haven't participated in any of the Christmas Bird Counts - there are several fairly close by - but our regular on legs can't seem to take it anymore. The year we catching up with me - but we still maintain our interest.

Many happy holiday days to you two & if any of us are still remember me - greet them for me - would you please?

Sincerely

The Starnes  
Darrell & Park

P.S. The Nature Conservancy bought a beautiful piece of property about 30 mi. SW of us - the Santa Ran Platform. over 3000 acres.