

Mountain Bluebird

22 Dec 1984

north of Lamoni, Decatur Co., IA

\*Livingston, \*#Moore, \*#Kent, \*Armstrong,

\*Myers, \*Petersen, \*Fuller, et al.; IBL 55:12, 28, 57; Livingston 1955

Record Number: 84-37

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jeffrey R. Livingston (22 December 1984)

Francis L. Moore (23 December 1984)

Thomas H. Kent (23 December 1984)

Eugene Armstrong (23 December 1984)

Robert K. Myers (24 December 1984)

Peter C. Petersen (26 December 1984)

Jim Fuller (2 January 1985)

Carl J. Bendorf (17 January 1985)

Raymond L. Cummins (20 January 1985)

Barbara L. Wilson (2 February 1985)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Francis L. Moore, 23 Dec 1984, P-0153

Thomas H. Kent, 23 Dec 1984, P-0156 (IBL 55:20)

REFERENCES

Christmas Bird Count: IBL 55:12

J. R. Livingston. 1985. Mountain Bluebird in Decatur County.  
IBL 55:19-20.

Photograph: IBL 55:20

Field Reports: IBL 55:28

Records Committee: IBL 55:57

VOTE: 7-I-P

I-P, good clear photo.

I-P, saw bird.

I-P, Gray breast, gray scapulars, nondescript head pattern  
indicate *S. currucoides*.

I-P, No problem--even I saw this one (after two tries).

I-P, Note: if this is the same bird we saw in February, it  
molted. Ours was primarily bright blue all over.

J. R. Livingston. 1985. Mountain Bluebird in Decatur County.  
Iowa Bird Life 55:19-20.

## Mountain Bluebird In Decatur County

JEFFREY R. LIVINGSTON  
300 S. Cherry St.  
LAMONI, IOWA 50140

The participants of the Lamoni Christmas Bird count received a rare treat this year, a Mountain Bluebird! The bird was sighted three miles north of Lamoni, Decatur County, Iowa on December 22, 1984.

Dan Long and I were walking a fence row of cedar trees playing a E. Screech Owl call to make the birds show themselves. As we reached the end of the fence, Dan noticed a strange bird above him in the tree. He called me over to help identify it. After about five minutes we were convinced that was a Mountain Bluebird. We immediately started noting key points about the bird so that we could document it. The bird cooperated completely, it stayed in open view listening to the Screech Owl call. After about five minutes our bluebird flew to another group of cedars about 100 feet away. Dan and I were so excited our only thoughts were to get Donald Gillaspey and his son Jim. Donald is the compiler for the count and we wanted him to see our rare find. We returned 45 minutes later and had a hard time finding the bird again. We soon found it on a nearby pond drinking from a small spot of water that wasn't frozen. This pond later proved to be the easiest place to find the bird.

The bird was a deep sky blue on the head and back, with the upper tail coverts and the primary wing feathers being a brighter blue. The breast was grayish white with a slight hint of blue. It was darker at the top getting lighter towards the belly. Although there was no eye ring, the feathers around the eye were a little lighter in color. The light gray on the neck extended around the sides, almost to the back of the neck. The bill was long, thin, and dark. The descriptions fits a male in fresh plumage.

The next morning, after a few phone calls by Donald, I was back out at the pond helping Tom Kent and Francis Moore find the bird. After looking for about an hour we finally found the bird on the pond. When the bird flew to a group of trees, they moved closer and took some photographs. All and all, I must admit, this was the most exciting Christmas count I have been on. I last saw the Mountain Bluebird in this area on December 23, 1984.



Mountain Bluebird  
Photo by T. H. Kent



DOCUMENTATION FORM

species: MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD # seen: 1

location: 1 MILE EAST AND 3 MILES NORTH OF LAMONI IOWA

dates: 12/22/84 - 12:00 TO 12:45

Habitat: A SMALL GROVE OF CEDAR TREES AROUND A FARMHOUSE AND A MOSTLY FROZEN POND IN A PASTURE ACROSS THE ROAD. THE CEDAR TREES HAVE MANY BERRIES.

Observed by: JEFFREY R. LIVINGSTON 203 east third, Lamoni, Iowa  
others: DAN LONG, DONALD GILLASPEY, JIM GILLASPEY, TOM KENT, FRANCES MOORE.

Viewing conditions: - A CLEAR, SUNNY DAY. TEMPERATURE ABOUT 30. WIND ABOUT 10mph FROM SOUTH - EAST. THE BIRD WAS VIEWED AT ALL ANGLES TO THE SUN. THE BIRD WAS FIRST SEEN ABOUT 10 FEET AWAY, THEN 30, AND THEN UP TO 100 FEET.

Optical equipment: 7x50mm binoculars and 25x50mm scope.

Previous experience with species: I HAVE SEEN THIS BIRD THREE TIMES BEFORE IN COLORADO. TWICE THIS YEAR (1984), AND ONCE IN 1981.

References consulted: while observing - FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS  
by ROGER TORY PETERSON  
after: AUDUBON MASTER GUIDE TO BIRDING vol. 3  
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS

FIELD NOTES MADE WHILE OBSERVING, THIS FORM 12/23/84.

DESCRIPTION: SEE NEXT PAGE

SIMILAR SPECIES AND HOW ELIMINATED: SEE NEXT PAGE

DESCRIPTION: A medium sized bird, smaller than a Robin, but larger than a Tree Sparrow. The shape was definitely that of a bluebird. The bird had a long thin bill that was dark in color. The breast was pale grayish white, with a hint of blue. It was darker at the top getting lighter towards the belly. The breast had no streaks or spots of any kind. The under tail coverts were almost white. The top of the head and back were a deep sky blue and the over-tail coverts and primaries were a brighter blue. The primary wing feathers extended about 2/3 the length of the tail. The tail was not long. The legs were dark. The eye was dark with the feathers around it being slightly lighter in color, although it did not have an eye ring. The flight was that of a bluebird, undulating, with frequent stops to perch on a wire or fence post. It would drop to the ground and then fly back up to a perch.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The bird at one glance was definitely a bluebird. The Eastern and Western Bluebirds both have rust markings on their breast and neck. The Eastern Bluebird has a more stocky shape than the Mountain Bluebird. I had a chance to compare as I had just seen a flock of Easterns about 5 min. before. The immature Eastern has a soeckled breast, this bird had none. The long thin bill eliminates the Shrikes as does the bright blue and the small size.



## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) How many? 1 ♂Location? S.W. 1/4 section, Section 24, Bloomington Township, Decatur Co., IowaType of habitat? Open hilly farmland near farm buildings with quite a few <sup>E</sup> Red Cedar interspersedWhen? date(s): December 23, 1984 time: 10:25 a.m. to 10:55 a.m.Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703others with you: Tom Kent, Jeff Livingstonothers before or after you: J. Donald Gillaspie 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.

This bird was first seen by me in a large deciduous approx 200 yards away on the far side of a small pond where the bird was drinking from a small hole in the ice. When the bird flew to another location its flight pattern was like that of an Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*). After locating the bird at a farm about 1/4 mi. to the west we watched the bird at close range. The bird looked about the same size as an Eastern Bluebird, with the same shape. The bill was a dark grayish-black color. The eye was black. The feet were black. The throat, auricular area and side of the neck was a bluish-gray color turning to a whitish color on the breast, belly and undertail coverts. There was a bluish wash on the side of the bird. The top of the head and nape was sky-blue color with some gray color mixed in. The back was approx. the same color as the head and nape but a little deeper blue color. The greater, median and lesser <sup>wing</sup> coverts were a step blue with grayish feather edging. The primaries, rump, upper-tail coverts and tail were even a deeper blue color, a deep sky-blue color. The bird was evidently a male in a plumage other than its breeding plumage, possibly a young male, or a first-year non-breeding male. I could find nothing on plumage variations of male birds for the Mountain Bluebird in the literature I looked through. No voice was heard. The bird did, one time, hover near a cedar tree and afterward landed in the cedar tree and ate a few of the cedar berries.

Similar species and how eliminated: Eastern and Western Bluebird should show some reddish on the breast, this bird did not. They are also a different color above and below.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Excellent viewing conditions, sunny. Seen from approx. 40 feet at closest using 10x40 Leitz binoculars and Celestron C90 telescope mounted on a Nikkormat FTN camera at 20X.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Very familiar with Eastern Bluebird; this is my first experience with Mountain Bluebird.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None

How long before field notes made? 15 min. this form completed? 1 1/2 hrs.

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

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Mountain Bluebird, 1 male, 23 Dec 1984, 2 mi. n. of Lamoni,  
Decatur Co., Iowa

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: with Jeff Livingston and Francis Moore; found  
yesterday on CBC by Livingston and others.

Time: 10:30 to 11:00 AM

Habitat: Southern Iowa Drift Plain farmland with rolling hills, 2  
artificial ponds (frozen) and cedar groves about farmsteads.

Description: "Obviously a bluebird, all blue. The primaries and part  
of the secondaries and the shoulder, rump and tail a rather  
bright blue. The rest of the back, top of the head, and parts of  
the wing coverts were a paler gray-blue. The underparts were  
grayish with a blue cast. The throat, upper breast, and flanks  
were a gray to gray-blue, slightly lighter in the throat. Only  
the belly and under tail coverts were a white-gray. The bill was  
dark, although it showed a little light at close range; it was  
thin and straight. There was a slight grayish cast to the face  
through and behind the eye. The eye did not have a distinct ring  
but the feathers were slightly lighter around the eye. The eye  
was dark. The leg color was not noted, but was dark."

Song: not heard.

Behavior: "Much like other bluebirds, flying up in the air and  
landing on a perch. Fairly tame. Ate cedar berries and drank from  
surface of pond."

Conditions: As close as 15 feet, light mostly behind observers, used  
10X binoculars and 400 mm camera lens.

Similar species: Entirely blue-gray appearance eliminates Eastern  
Bluebird. The bill was long and thin, although no Eastern  
Bluebirds were available for direct comparison. Photos should  
document bill features.

Agreement: all.

Previous experience: Have seen this species in the west.

References/time used: I looked at Nat. Geographic Guide before bird  
found.

Time of notes/taped: Notes dictated 15 min. after leaving bird.  
Typed 22 hours later.



## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What Species? Mtn. Bluebird, male How many? 1 - one  
 Location? 3 miles north of Lamoni, Iowa  
 Type of Habitat? Cedar trees along country road  
 When? date(s)? Dec 23, 1984 time: 1<sup>00</sup> to 1<sup>30</sup> PM  
 Who? your name and address: Eugene Armstrong Boonville, Iowa  
 others with you: Elaine Armstrong, Dennis Thompson  
 others before or after you: Don Gillispie, 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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Steel Blue down back  
 light color on breast  
 white under tail  
 wings slightly bluer than back  
 dark color on eyebrow  
 sat up right, not hunched like other bluebirds

Similar species and how eliminated: Eastern Bluebird, shrike bird  
nearly all one color

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification?

no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: 7-25 bin. 20X scope 40-50 ft est  
bright sun light sat on overhead wires, then flew to cedar berries  
 Previous experience with this and similar species:  
seen often in ~~the~~ mountains of Colo, Ariz + New Mexico  
 References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins  
 How long before field notes made?

2 hrs

How long before this form completed?

2 hrs

## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) How many? 1Location? Sec. 24 of Bloomington Township - Decatur County - Iowa - (2 mi. north of Lamoni)Type of habitat? Farm yard with fairly large Red Cedar groveWhen? date(s): Dec. 24, 1984 time: 1:30 P.M. to 1:45 P.M.Who? your name and address: Robert K. Myers, 1236 Sylvia Ave., Waterloo, Iowaothers with you: Betsy Myers (wife)others before or after you: Francis Moore, Tom Kent, et al.

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.

Bird was same basic size and shape as an Eastern Bluebird, Tail was slightly notched.

The bird showed an almost tern-like or swallow-like flight pattern in the way it would hover near the cedar trees.

Head, back, throat, and breast ~~was~~ were a light blue-gray color.

Wings were bluish with the primaries being a darker more vivid blue.

The lower back, rump and tail ~~was~~ were a very bright almost glowing blue.

Belly and undertail coverts were white.

Bill was small and dark.

Eyes were dark.

Most observers thought the bird was a ♀ in very good plumage. I wonder if the bird might be an imm. ♂ because of the amount of bluish color on throat, breast, and back and because of the overall intensity of the blue in the rump, tail and wings

Similar species and how eliminated: Eastern bluebird would show ~~st~~ some reddish on throat or breast. Smaller more delicate bill and color differences eliminate Pinyon Jay and Blue-gray Tanager

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:  
Bright sunlight - excellent conditions - closest was 20'-25' (camera focus distance) -

I used B&K 7x35 binoculars and Nikon FE2 with 600mm lens.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Very familiar with Eastern but

This is my first Mountain.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Birds of North America (Nat. Geo. Soc.)

How long before field notes made? on the spot this form completed? 2 days



## SUPPORTING DETAILS: UNCOMMON OR RARE SPECIES AND/OR SPECIES IN HIGH NUMBERS

CBC name \_\_\_\_\_ ~~etc~~ date 12-26-84 Compiler \_\_\_\_\_Observer writing this account and date Peter C. Peterson, Dec. 26, 1984SPECIES Mountain Bluebird NUMBER, AGE, SEX one, adult maleDistance from bird(s) within 30' Relative size of bird slightly larger than P. FinchHEAD & NECK (Describe forehead, crown, auricular, malar region, median line, etc.) bright blue

EYE &amp; LORES (Describe supercilium, ring, stripe, color, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

UPPER & LOWER MANDIBLES blackLEGS & FEET dark

UPPERPARTS (Describe nape, back, rump, upper tail coverts, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

bright blue

UNDERPARTS (Describe throat, belly, side, flanks, crissum, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

light grey-blue, belly whiteRECTRICES (Describe inner, middle, outer tail feathers, color pattern, shape, etc.) bright blueWING (Describe color, length, shape, linings, bars, coverts, leading and trailing edges, etc.) bright blue, no bars, length & shape same as for Eastern BluebirdVOCALIZATION Song in response to W. Screech Owl matched own up. Bluebird tape.BEHAVIOR Bird flushed from Cedar & then returned to back side. We surrounded the short border & played the W. Screech Owl & up. Bluebird tape. The bird flew up & hovered over heads as well as vocalizing when W. Sc. Owl tape played.Date of observation Dec. 26, 1984 Time 10:55 to 11:10 Weather O.C. Sky cover O.C. - lgt. Fr. rainDuration of observation 15 min. Bird - Sun orientation sun completely aboveExact location 3 1/2 mi. N.E. Lomov, Ia - abandoned farm area, of gravel rd.Habitat Cedar border Other observers Wynne Peterson, Lewin, Brian & CoreyOptical equipment 10X40 binocs PeterADDITIONAL COMMENTS Weather conditions made photography nearly impossible so it was not attempted.



What species? MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD How many? 1Location? NORTH OF LAMONIType of habitat? FARMSTEAD - RED CEDAR TREESWhen? date(s): 2 JAN, 1985 time: 1:20 to 1:30 PMWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, 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.

BIRD CAME TO A TAPED E. SCREECH OWL CALL WITHIN A FEW SECONDS AND SAT ON A UTILITY LINE + RED CEDAR TREES. WAS AGITATED WITH OWL CALL.

GENERAL SIZE, SHAPE, ETC.

SMALLER THAN ROBIN, LARGER THAN HOUSE SPARROW.  
TITMUSH SHAPE. BLUE COLOR OVERALL

BILL - MODERATE LENGTH + SHARP - DARK COLOR

EYE - DARK - DID NOT SEE AN EYE RING

HEAD - ROUNDED + BLUE COLOR

BACK + WINGS - VERY BLUE - NO OTHER MARKINGS

BREAST - A LIGHTER + GRAYER BLUE THAN BACK + WINGS

TAIL - BLUE - MODERATE LENGTH + NOTCHED

OBSERVED EATING RED CEDAR BERRIES.

Similar species and how eliminated: EASTERN BLUEBIRD - NO 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:

SUNNY - MID DAY - SUN TO BACK 8X40 BINOCULARS  
VIEWED AT 25-50 FEET

Previous experience with species and similar ones: MOUNTAINS OF COLORADO + WYOMING

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATE this form completed? 7 HOURS

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



What species? MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD How many? 1 ADULT MALELocation? C. 3 mi. N of LAMONI, DECATUR Co.Type of habitat? ABANDONED FARMSTEAD w/ CEDAR GROVES.When? date(s): 17 JAN 1985 time: 11:55 AM to NOONWho? your name and address: CARL J. BENDOFF 825 7TH AVE IOWA CITY 52240

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

others before or after you: KENT, MOORE, Peterson, GILLASPEY, ARNSTEINER, et al.

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.

BIRD briefly perched in top of 30 ft dead tree. About size of E. Bluebird but posture more horizontal, more like a Robin. Nest upright and hunched like E. Bluebird.

Entire upper parts were uniform pastel blue color. Underparts were uniform lighter gray blue shading lighter toward under belly. Bill was black and straight, more than than E. Bluebird. Legs black and longish for a bluebird. Eye black.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: about 20 yds with 7X binos, bright overcast at my back.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: - 2nd sighting of Mountain Bluebird w/ both E. & Western.  
References and persons consulted before writing description:How long before field notes made? 10 MIN. this form completed? 8 hours.

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF  
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

84-32

1. Species Mountain Bluebird 2. Number (1)  
3. Location 4 mi NNE of Lamoni, Iowa 52544  
4. Date 1-20-85 5. Time Bird Seen: 10:15 AM to 10:45 AM  
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Unmistakeable Light-Blue Bluebird shaped bird -

7. Description of voice, if heard: NOT HEARD  
8. Description of behavior: Hovered while feeding on Cedar berries otherwise it sat nervously on the Cedars sunning itself  
9. Habitat - general: Farmstead Cedar Grove  
specific:  
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain: NONE  
11. Distance (how measured)? 15 ft est 12. Optical equipment: 7x35 Binoculars  
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Excellent Light - clear - sun at back  
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: seen before California 1970  
15. Other observers: Tom Johnson Photographed  
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes  
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Many  
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: NONE  
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

Signature: Raymond L. Cummins Address: 3-1-85  
Date: 3-1-85 Centerville City, State: Iowa 52544



Mountain Bluebird - 1 Feb 2, 1985  
 3 miles N of Lamoni, Iowa

Description: 1 very blue male. Size + shape as the Eastern Bluebirds with it. Bright blue. Back, ~~to~~ a brighter, darker blue. Crown + breast a gray blue. Belly white. Bill narrow. Shade of blue lighter than the ♂ Eastern Bluebirds with it. Ends of primaries look black. Rump + tail a really shiny blue. Seems darker through the eye.

Similar species: Blue coloration on underparts separates this from the other bluebird species

Viewing conditions: WSW of us. Sunny day. Morning - 10:30?  
 8x binocs. Using field guides. I'm not sure of distance, but it isn't far. Saw it 5 or 10 minutes.

Notes written while seeing bird.

Barbara L Wilson  
 Rt 1 Box 41  
 Hastings, Ia 51540