

Fish Crow Record Number: 91-23  
8 May 1991 Classification: A-D  
Big Sand Mound Nature Preserve, Muscatine Co., IA  
\*Tim Brush  
IBL 61:94, 62:71, 66:97

#### DOCUMENTATION

Tim Brush, 1906 Elmwood Dr., Bettendorf, IA 52722 (moved to Dept of Biology, Univ. of Texas -- Pan American, 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX 78539)

#### REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:94

Records Committee: IBL 62:71; 66:97

#### VOTE: 2-A-D, 5-NA

A-D, I've read the document several times and although I'm not familiar with this bird the document is acceptable to me. This species is not totally unexpected as they seem to be expanding up the Mississippi River Basin.

NA, A good documentation with call described. A Fish Crow was seen in Pike, Missouri just a few weeks before this record. However, American Crow calls are extremely variable, and size of a lone bird can be subjective. Because this would be a first state record, I am reluctantly voting NA. For this species, a recording may be needed to be positive of the identification.

NA, This report is strongly suggestive of Fish Crow. In evaluating this record, I considered the following: Could this have been a juvenile Am. Crow, which has a call quite similar to a fish crow? Based on BBA and other published information, it appears highly unlikely that a fully fledged, juv. Am. Crow would occur at this date. Probability. Fish Crow, a migratory species, is regular in central Illinois and seems to be expanding north. This is an appropriate time, as well as appropriate habitat for an overmigrant or vagrant to appear. For a Fish Crow to appear in S.E. Iowa would not be unexpected -- Iowa birders have been watching for it for years. With regard to the description, the smaller size is probably discernible in the field, but without side by side comparison with Am. Crow, this is somewhat subjective. The circling behavior I am unfamiliar with. Bent seems to substantiate it. On the other hand, I have seen Am. Crows circle too. The description of the sound and the frequency of the calls were correct for Fish Crow and probably inconsistent for Am. Finally, we have an observer who is familiar with both species. I feel the scales are tipped toward Fish Crow. However, I feel a conservative approach is warranted. This would be one of the (if not the) most northerly inland report on record for this species. Clearly, this species cannot be separated by plumage characteristics. The time involved in the observation was very short, and the number of calls heard was small. I think this species will probably continue to be a problem in Iowa in the future. Quite honestly, I feel this documentation was quite good, all things considered. It's probably as good as we will get, which means we will have a hard time getting an acceptable record short of a specimen.

NA, The descriptive facts are not definitive enough to support ID by call alone, especially when this is a time of year when many juvenile American Crows, with begging calls that sound similar to Fish Crows, have just fledged. The statement "somewhat small for a crow" seems very subjective especially since no direct size comparison was available. The Fish Crow should be slimmer bodied with more pointed wings compared to American Crow.

NA, The observer is familiar with this species and heard the bird call 11 times. The date is early for young American Crows. The size and circling behavior are much less specific. I find no records this far north in the Midwest. Nothing in the information presented argues against Fish Crow. For such an unprecedented record of such a difficult species to identify, I would like to have multiple confirming identifications and a voice recording. Until then, we should consider this record as a possible or unconfirmed sighting.

NA, A good documentation but I am afraid that without a recording of the call I will have to go NA on this one. I spent five years in the tidewater area of Virginia and remember hearing Fish Crows calling hundreds of mornings as I woke up. I have heard many times calls similar to Fish Crow calls

in SE Iowa, some really having a nasal quality to them but always discounted as being American Crows because they were not beyond doubt Fish Crows or because I was not able to obtain a recording of the call to prove my record. Timing is good for Fish Crow record and young American Crow should not be out of the nest at this time of year but I do not think that this record is beyond reasonable doubt without a recording as tangible evidence to support the record. I did not see or hear of the circling behavior of Fish Crow while I lived in the Norfolk/Portsmouth/Virginia Beach, VA area.

A-D, Good observation and details from an observer experienced with Fish Crows. Distinctive calls were noted as well as behavior of soaring or gliding in circles. American Birds reports Fish Crow in April 1991 in Pike Co., Missouri, which "was at the northern edge of its established range." Pike County is along the Mississippi River and just south of Quincy, Illinois, and Hannibal, Missouri. A Fish Crow along the Mississippi River in southeast Iowa could be expected to show up sometime. I think this is a good record of a Fish Crow in Iowa.

RE-VOTE (by mail 1995): 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, Although we do not yet have a recording of this species, multiple "sound" records over 4 years are enough to confirm that this species is present in Iowa.

A-D McKay documentation, NA Petersen documentation, These could be the same birds but not much is given in the Petersen documentation to tell for sure. For this species to be accepted we should have at least a documentation with the person submitting the documentation having seen the adult bird giving the call note of this species. A recording and photograph (or specimen) would be ideal but the above might have to do for now.

A-D (as before).

RE-VOTE (by mail 1995): 6 A-D, 1 NA

A-D, Multiple sound identifications convince me that this bird has moved up the Mississippi Valley. Reports are limited to April-May because later dates preclude eliminating juvenile American Crows.

A-D, These records hinge on the call note. Should it have been two-noted?

A-D, No NA comments to discuss -- my prior discussion stands.

A-D, No change from my previous A-D vote.



DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

91-23

What species? Fish Crow How many? 1  
Location? Big Sand-Mound Nature Preserve, extreme NE Louisa + SE Muscatine Counties -  
Type of Habitat? bottomland forest/pond approximately on boundary  
When? date(s): 8 May 1991 time: 9:53 to 9:54  
Who? your name and address: Tim Brush, 1906 Elmwood Drive, Bettendorf IA 52722 \*  
Others with you: none (319) 355-6209  
Others before or after you: none

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.

Somewhat small for a crow, all black, no gloss seen but would not expect it in light conditions  
wingbeats seemed light for a crow  
called "cah" - nasal, soft in volume - 10 times  
called "ca-ah" - also nasal & soft - 1 time  
bird circled 2-3 times directly overhead, otherwise flew steadily & directly south → North over the bottomland forest.

\* address after Aug. 1: Department of Biology, University of Texas - Pan American, 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539

Similar species; how eliminated:

Calls eliminated American Crows, which were calling at the same time. I am familiar with both adult & young crow calls of both American & fish crows. The calls were identical to those of Fish Crows in New Jersey. The circling behavior is unique to fish crows & the upriver migration is typical of fish crows in NJ - overmigration

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
light overcast, 75' overhead (estimated), 10x40 Leitz binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones:  
seen & heard frequently in New Jersey, in association with Am. Crows

References and persons consulted before writing description:  
none, ~~but~~ but did look at Audubon Guide & Golden Guide after writing my initial description & before writing this description.  
How long before field notes made? immediately this form completed? 1 1/2 days  
after sighting

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).