

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/24/00

Black-billed Magpie

8 May 1997

s. of Westfield, Plymouth Co., IA

*J. Fuller, *T. Kent

IBL 67:89, 68:86

Record Number: 97-13

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 42246

Wm. F. Huser, 140 Oakmont Dr., S. Sioux City, NE 68776 [not reviewed]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:89

Records Committee: IBL 68:86

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Black bill noted by one observer.

97-13

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

97-13

SPECIES: Black-billed Magpie

LOCATION: Lineberry Ranch along 234th Street in Leoss Hills
(Plymouth County)

DATE & TIME: 8 May, 1997 (7:05-10 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: Previously seen by Clint Lineberry and Eugene and Eloise
Armstrong. I was with Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault.

DESCRIPTION: Tom Kent first spotted two birds flying along the
ridgeline to the north from a wooded draw to a large tree. One bird
could be seen sitting in the tree, and later flying back to the original
draw. The viewing distance was close to 200 yards. These were very
large birds, estimated to be about the length of an American Crow, but
much thinner. The bird appeared entirely black and white, with a very
long tail. The entire bird was dark, except for a white belly and flanks,
and a white area along the shoulder. Bill color was not seen. In flight,
each wing had two white areas (one on the primaries and the other on
the scapulars) separated by a black area. The flight was quick flapping
followed by gliding. The voice was not heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The only similar bird is Yellow-billed Magpie.
Although the bill color was not seen, that bird has never been seen
away from a very concentrated range almost entirely in California.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: Early morning on a sunny, cool
day day looking to the north and northwest at diustances of about 200
yards with Swift Audubon (8.5 X 44) binoculars.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this bird numerous times in
the western U.S. , including a number of individuals as recently as
February, 1997, in Idaho.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes written after viewing,
and National Geographic field guide was looked at. This form was
typed on 12 May.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Black-billed Magpie; **Number:** 2

Location: 234th St., s. of Westfield, Plymouth Co., IA.

Date: 8 May 1997 (also 16, 17, 19 May); **Time:** 7:00 to 7:15 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: seen in this area occasionally over last few years; recent report by Bill Huser. Seen by many.

Habitat and circumstances: riparian, in valley of Loess Hills, 1.5 miles from Big Sioux River bottoms.

Description of bird: Two magpies flew along the valley below the ridge where they had been seen two days before by Eugene and Eloise Armstrong. Later one was seen better as it flew and sat in trees. Body about crow sized, but slimmer with long streaming dark tail. Black and white bird with white primaries and scapulars. Black below except for wide white band across belly. Head and bill all black. White on scapulars evident on sitting birds. On later visits, a thick area in a plum thicket could have been a nest. The birds frequently came to this area, but I could not be sure of a nest.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: none

Any one have reservations?: no

Light: looking north; **Distance:** 100 yards (guess); **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope

Previous experience: have seen many, but not in Iowa before

References before/after viewing: looked at field guides at various times.

Time of notes: 11 hours after first sighting; **Final typing:** 20 days after first sighting

97-13

DOCUMENTATION FORM

For extraordinary bird sightings in X_IA, __NE or __SD

Species: Black-billed Magpie Number seen: 1 pr w/3 young

Location: Lineberry's Ranch, Plymouth County, IA

Habitat: open prairie with scattered trees and thickets.

Date: see below

Time:

Bill Huser 140 Oakmont Dr., S. Sioux City, NE 68776

Others with me: many others saw nest, no known observers saw fledglings.

Others before/after me:

Description:

The adult pair of birds have been previously described and identification is beyond doubt.

On 5/9/97, I located a large (>1 foot in diameter), globular nest constructed of coarse sticks in a plum thicket. It was in the vicinity of a pair of magpies and was approached and entered by at least one of them. The nest was approximately 9 feet off the ground.

On 5/16-18, several birders saw the nest from a distance, with the magpie pair nearby.

On 6/25, I found the magpies near the nest but heard more vocalizations than at past visits. On closer approach I found in a plum thicket 20 meters from the nest site three magpie fledglings. They were much the same size and color of the adults but lacked the long tail of the adult, theirs extending a mere inch or so beyond their rump. The black colored pattern on the adults was replaced by a dark chocolate brown of the same pattern. The birds were unwilling to fly (& did not do so). Their vocalizations were limited to short, coarse, but rather weak, calls.

Similar species & differentiation: none

Disagreeing identifications: none

Conditions - light, distance & optics: Minolta 10X50 binocs, Celestron 32X60 scope; excellent, indirect lighting under the plum canopy at a distance of 1.5 meters.

Previous experience with species: resident bird in my home county.

References: N. Geo.

Notes taken, with bird in view: later: immediately after

W.M.F. Huser
7/22/97