

Black-headed Grosbeak  
30 Sep 1983  
4 mi east of Larrabee, Cherokee Co., IA  
\*M. Brewer  
IBL 53:103; 54:40

Record Number: 83-34  
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Marion Brewer

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 53:103  
Records Committee: IBL 54:40

VOTE: 1-III, 4-IV, 2-V

IV, description quite incomplete for details discussed by Peterjohn, IBL 53:22-23. Breast/belly contrast, eye line rump color, wing lining not mentioned.

V, Not enough detail for this species.

IV, Possible, but this "can of worms" isn't worth opening unless supporting photos or an experienced observer are involved. (By experienced I mean one who has much experience with Black-headed plumages.)

IV, Lateness of date suggestive, as is location. However description does not allow clinching a Black-headed Grosbeak; probably hybrid. Suggest identifying "Black-headed Grosbeak hybrid" and listing under Bl.H. Grosbeak rather than Rose-br. Grosbeak.

IV, Black-headed Grosbeak is certainly a reasonable identification. I wish it had been in flight so wing linings could be used to tell if the bird was a young male--which can have orange color like a robin across the breast. Both color of underparts and streaking seem like Black-headed, but I feel young Rose-breasteds and hybrids would both complicate the situation in fall.

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

83-34

SPECIES: BLACK-HEADED GROSBEEK

DATE SEEN: Sept 30, 1983

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Cherokee County

OBSERVERS: M. Brewer

DATE OF REVIEW: January 1984

METHOD OF REVIEW: Mailed to Records Committee

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS: The Records Committee is having problems with submitted records of Black-headed Grosbeak. While some are undoubtedly correct, as yet we have not had a record submitted which could unequivocally be called a Black-headed Grosbeak. Observers are referred to the article in Iowa Bird Life Vol 53, pages 22-23, which indicates the features which must be seen to clinch Black-headed Grosbeak. Unfortunately, in Iowa hybrids probably make up most of the birds which are seen to have Black-headed Grosbeak characteristics, and so it is difficult to determine the purity of any given bird. However observers in western Iowa are encouraged to keep looking for Black-headed Grosbeaks and to learn the distinguishing features of the species, as well as those of hybrids.

The late date of this observation, and the location, are suggestive of Black-headed Grosbeak, but Rose-breasted Grosbeak has been reported in December in Iowa, and the possibility was raised of a bird-of-the-year male, Rose-breasted, which may have an orange tinge to the breast.

Many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (in fact most) possess some hybrid characters, but these are most obvious in western Iowa birds.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.



BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF  
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Brewer  
83-34

1. Species Black Headed Grosbeak (Female) 2. Number 1
3. Location 4 mile E of Larrabee
4. Date: 9-30-83 5. Time Bird Seen: 2:15 PM to 2:20

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):

cat Bird sized, with seed eating bill. Darker Brown than Rose Breasted Grosbeak; white wing bars with white spots in secondaries streaking on back. Breast was a burnt orange with fine streaking on side flank + slight was not observed

7. Description of voice, if heard: NONE

8. Description of behavior:

9. Habitat - general: Road DITCH Plum Thicket  
some vines  
specific: Almost all of leaves dropped

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain:  
Rose Breasted Female Grosbeak. Orange Breast

11. Distance (how measured)?

30 ft Estimated

12. Optical equipment:

15x45 Spotting Scope  
also 7.5 Binocular

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

Clear day with sun to my back

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

only Rose breasted Grosbeaks

15. Other observers:

NONE

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Peterson, Golden, & Audubons

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3 Hours

Signature: Mason Brewer Address: RR #2

Date: 9-30-83 City, State: Cherokee, Ia

57012