

Summer Tanager

Record Number: 98-08

11 Jan 1998

Classification: A-P

Iowa City, Johnson Co., IA

*Mary E. Noble, *T. Kent, *J. Fuller

to 5 Mar; P-0575, P-0576, IBL 68:62,96, Noble 1998

DOCUMENTATIONS

Mary E. Noble (11 Jan+), 315 S. 7th Ave., Iowa City [*9/4/98]

Thomas H. Kent (9 Feb), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller (9 Feb), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

PHOTOGRAPHS

Mary Noble (25 Jan), P-0575

T. H. Kent (10 Feb), P-0576

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:62, 96

Records Committee: IBL 69:90

Noble, M. E. 1998. Summer Tanager wintering in Johnson County.
Iowa Bird Life 68:132-133.

Photo: Field Notes 52:206, 1998, P-0576

VOTE: 5 A-P, 2 A-D

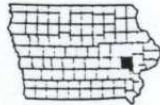
A-P, Interesting photo. I have seen Summer Tanager show the crested look before but not to that extreme. Light bill is evident in photo.

A-P, Photo shows a large bill, proportions of which would eliminate Scarlet/Western Tanagers. Latter also eliminated by lack of wing bars. Problem is possibility of Hepatic Tanager. Fuller noted darker auricular area. No observer described loreal area which is darker in imm./female Hepatic. Eyering and paleness in bill (Fuller) indicative of Summer, which would not be unprecedented.

SUMMER Tanager WINTERING IN JOHNSON COUNTY

MARY E. NOBLE

On 11 January 1998 a bird appeared at my backyard heated birdbath that I immediately knew was something different, but it would be several weeks before I learned it was a Summer Tanager. This is an urban residential neighborhood; my yard is small with extensive deciduous shrubs, some trees, a brush pile, and several feeders that attract House Finches and House Sparrows in large numbers, but a limited variety of other winter birds. My first impression of this visitor was of a small, thrush-sized bird, with olive back. It disappeared while I was retrieving the camera, but returned intermittently until 6 March. Initially it was attracted only to the water; later it came often to sunflower seed feeders, one of which was attached to my viewing window, so I got close views of its markedly yellow breast and undertail coverts. The back and sides usually appeared to be fairly uniformly olive green or brown, with no wing bars. When seen close to House Finches, it was plainly larger. The bill was thick at the base like finchs', but much longer and notched in the side. It had a distinct eye ring, broken front and back, and often showed a flycatcher-like crest. Some weeks and several musings through field guides passed before I finally stopped on the tanager page in the National Geographic guide. My previous experience had been limited to a few views of male Scarlet Tanagers in rural wooded settings, and this generally fluffed-up bird had seemed rounder or chunkier than the field-guide tanagers. I was unsure whether this was a Scarlet or Summer tanager until it perched in the sun with its back toward me and showed such contrast between darker primaries and the back, that I was convinced it must be a Scarlet Tanager and I e-mailed this conclusion to several local birders. I sent several less-than-ideal slides of the bird, taken through my window, to Jim Fuller and he tried to get an in-person look, but the bird didn't appear again for nearly two weeks. When I next saw it on 8 February, I called Jim and Tom Kent and they were both able to see the bird on separate visits the next day. They agreed, and soon convinced me, that the bird was a Summer Tanager.



The following notes from Tom Kent's documentation point out some of the key points in that identification:

"The bird was fairly uniform in color varying from dusky yellow with perhaps a slight greenish tinge to areas with more dark gray brown. The brightest yellow was in the vent area and undertail. The primaries were a dark brown-black, but the wing coverts were dusky yellow brown. There was a faint thin bar on the median coverts and outer aspect of the greater coverts. The head was relatively large and not round as I would expect in a Scarlet Tanager. There was a slight crest on the posterior crown that was not always evident. The bill was large, long, and pointed. The lower mandible was flesh colored and the upper mandible was dark. The overall coloration and plainness indicate a female or immature bird. The lack of prominent gray in the auriculars and light bill color argue against Hepatic Tanager. The bill length, head shape, and relative paleness of the wings favor Summer Tanager over Scarlet Tanager. The lack of prominent wing bars appears to exclude Western Tanager. The apparent lack of orange tint suggests a bird from the West or perhaps an immature."

The only other Iowa winter record was a Summer Tanager photographed in Scott County on 2 December 1990. The Iowa City bird showed evidence of an injury in that it would perch at the window feeder on one foot with the other foot, which seemed incapable of gripping, held up against the breast covering a small dark bare spot. Perhaps this might explain its willingness to take up winter residence in this unlikely place?

315 South 7th. Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52245

CLARK'S GREBE IN POWESHIEK COUNTY AT DIAMOND LAKE PARK

PAM AND REID ALLEN

Early on the afternoon of 13 December 1997 (about 12:15 p.m.), we stopped at Diamond Lake Park in Poweshiek County to look for an Oldsquaw which Mark Proescholdt had seen the day before at this park. Upon arrival, our first words were, "Oh, there's a Western Grebe," as we scanned over the waterfowl present. God only knows what made us take a really good look at this bird, except some "sixth sense" said, "wait a minute--this could be a Clark's Grebe!" This large, long-necked grebe had a long, pointed, bright orangish/yellow bill with a very noticeable black line running along the ridge of the upper mandible. The right eye seemed to be more "in the white" than the left, although both eyes were definitely "in the white." The lores were white as well on both sides of the face. The black cap extended from the top of the bill over the crown and down the nape and along the back of the neck down to the back of the bird. The main body of the bird seemed to be a lighter grayish-black than the back of the neck and the cap/crown, with the flanks showing a much lighter appearance. The bird did not vocalize or fly during the time it was being observed but did dive several times.

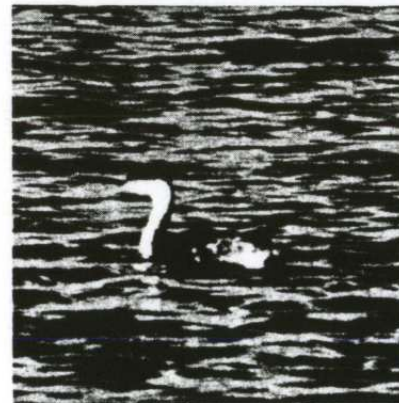
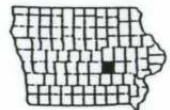


Fig. 1. Clark's Grebe at Diamond Lake. Left: bird on water, 13 Dec 1997; photo by Reid Allen and right: bird taking flight, 14 Dec 1997; photo by Thomas Kent.



Orange-crowned Warblers often manage to hang on through the winter farther north than most of their relatives. No fewer than five wintered in Illinois this year, including this bird in Will County on December 30, 1997. Photograph/ Joe B. Milosevich



Out of season in name and in fact, this Summer Tanager at Iowa City on February 10, 1998, furnished a first winter record for Iowa. Photograph/ T. H. Kent

appeared in the Region this winter. Ohio's first Say's Phoebe appeared at Kososing Res., Knox, OH, Dec. 11 (†SA) and remained through at least Jan. 6 (BGL, LY, LRo, ph. m.ob.). Another Say's Phoebe was seen at Moore's Hill, Dearborn, IN, Dec. 27 and Jan. 2 (ph. †ND); an identifiable photo was obtained, providing the state's first confirmed record of this w. species.

The only sizable concentration of Am. Crows consisted of 25,900 counted at a roost near Cincinnati Dec. 1 (FR). Correspondents throughout the Region reported abundant Red-breasted Nuthatches; peak daily counts exceeding 20 birds were recorded in 3 states. The season's only Bewick's Wren was found in Barton, MO, Dec. 2 (MR). A Sedge Wren was found below the dam at L. Clinton, IL, Dec. 19 (DBo et al.). Marsh Wrens were unusually common, with reports from every state except Kentucky; the largest concentration was in Iowa, where an impressive six birds were found. Both kinglets were widespread and more numerous than normal. Indiana's 2nd **Mountain Bluebird** was discovered at L. Monroe Jan. 31 (†HT, †AB, ph. Indiana Audubon Society field trippers et al.) and, to the delight of Hoosier birders, remained through Feb. 25 (†m.ob). Winter period Hermit Thrushes were reported in every state, and Am. Robin numbers were far above normal. Varied Thrushes "invaded" the Region with 7 reports: five in Iowa, plus singletons in Illinois and Indiana. Single Gray Catbirds were seen on Kelly's I., OH, Dec. 21 (TB), and near Decorah, IA, where

a bird survived the winter (Dec. 1–Jan. 23) by feeding on cat food and suet (RCe). Small numbers of Am. Pipits were found in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio, but the peak count was 62 on the Horseshoe L., IL, CBC Jan. 3 (fide VK). Cedar Waxwings numbers were low across the Region; the only sizable count was 500 in Benton, MO (fide MR).

A White-eyed Vireo was observed in Kent, OH, Feb. 7–10 (S&MS, LRo ph.). The presence of 12 warbler species during the season attests to the mildness of the El Niño winter. Among the "expected" warblers were Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned (recorded in 3 states, with five in Illinois), Pine (reported in every state except Iowa and Kentucky), and Com. Yellowthroat (found in 3 states). The surprises included a Nashville in Spfld. Dec. 21 (VK); a Cape May at a Chillicothe, MO, suet feeder Dec. 28–Jan. 15 (SK) and another on the Union, IL, CBC Jan. 4 (†RCh); a male Black-throated Blue in Jo Davies, IL (EM, DWi); a Prairie in Pope, IL, Dec. 21 (†MB); a Palm in Warren, KY, Feb. 26 (DR); a N. Waterthrush in Tuscarawrus, OH, Dec. 30 and Jan. 4 (†ES, LRo); a male Wilson's at Spfld. Dec. 16 & 23 (†DBo); and, most remarkably, a Yellow-breasted Chat (eating bees) at the Palos Forest Preserve, Cook, IL, Dec. 28–Jan. 2 (m.ob.).

TANAGERS TO FINCHES

A female or imm. **Summer Tanager** frequented an Iowa City feeder from Jan. 23 through Feb. 10 (†TK, †JE, ph.), to provide

Iowa's first record for these winter months. In Charleston, IL, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak lingered until Dec. 1 (L. Barrie Hunt). Also tardy in departing the Region was an Indigo Bunting at Horseshoe L., IL, Jan. 3 (fide VK). Dickcissels lingered in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa; the latest departing individual remained n. of Burlington, IA, until Jan. 19 (ABe). Spotted Towhee reports included two from Illinois and two from Iowa. Chipping Sparrows tarried throughout the Region, providing reports from every state except Iowa. *Holmes*, OH, produced 2 fine reports: The first was a Lark Sparrow that was present from Dec. 30 through Feb. 16 (†ES, BGL, ph. m.ob.). The 2nd was a Lark Bunting, which was discovered in e. reaches of the county Dec. 31 (†ES) and remained through Feb. 16 (BGL, LRo, ph. m.ob.). Rarely reported in winter, a Vesper Sparrow found in Franklin, IL, Jan. 1 (LS), was noteworthy.

Le Conte's Sparrows were reported in every state except Missouri and Ohio. The southernmost sighting involved a bird that wintered in the Long Pt. Unit of Reelfoot Lake N.W.R., KY; it was seen Dec. 16 & 27, and again in mid-March (BPB, DR). The only Harris's Sparrow reported e. of the Mississippi was in Urbana, IL, Dec. 6 (RCh). Peak Lapland Longspur counts included 7500 in Clay, IA, Feb. 28 (LS) and 3000 in McLean, IL, Dec. 6 (MRe). Large Snow Bunting accumulations were restricted to Iowa, where 800 were counted in Winnebago Feb. 1 (MK).

Fine meadowlark numbers were report-



Summer Tanager 98-08 P-0576
Iowa City, Johnson Co., IA
10 Feb 1998 T. H. Kent

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71 -3 INDNN -SRU 9386

Fuller, Jim

To: Mary Noble
Subject: RE: Yellow bird

-----Original Message-----

From: Mary Noble [SMTP:mary-noble@uiowa.edu]
Sent: Monday, January 26, 1998 11:00 AM
To: james-fuller@uiowa.edu; richard-hollis@uiowa.edu; carol-a-thompson@uiowa.edu
Subject: Yellow bird

FYI, the bird I was asking folks about at last Thursday's bird club meeting I'm now sure is a Scarlet Tanager. It showed up again in my back yard Friday-Sunday and this morning just before I left about 10. Saturday morning, for the first time it was coming to sunflower feeders (before then I'd just seen it at the bird bath). A few times this weekend it was at a window feeder just inches away from me. It's yellowish green above with darker wings (when viewed from the back), yellow below. Now that I've seen it just inches away from house finches I can see it's definitely larger than finches and house sparrows and has a large beak with notch in the side (described in Peterson, but not Nat. Geog. or the Golden field guides). It appears to have an injury on the right side of its breast which it sometimes covers by holding its right claw over the spot. I first saw it Jan. 11, and sporadically since then -- usually in the mornings. When it leaves it almost always flies south probably to somewhere the other side of Court St. (I'm on 7th Ave. just north of Court) I've tried taking pictures and should find out tomorrow if any are recognizable.

Mary E. Noble
CPS, Main Library
University of Iowa Libraries
Iowa City, IA 52242
Phone: (319) 335-5889
<mailto:mary-noble@uiowa.edu>

338-6047
319 335-5889

98-08

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Summer Tanager; **Number:** 1 basic

Location: 315 S. 7th Ave. Iowa City, Iowa

Date: 9 Feb 1998; **Time:** 8:10 to 8:15 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: Mary Noble found the bird at her feeder on 23 January 1998 and has seen it intermittently since. Jim Fuller saw the birds about 10:00 a.m. after I saw it.

Habitat and circumstances: Urban area, small back yard with several feeders and brush cover.

Description of bird: The bird was eating at a window feeder when I got there and must have left while I went to my car for a camera. It was larger than a House Finch and the appropriate size for a tanager. The bird was fairly uniform in color varying from dusky yellow with perhaps a slight greenish tinge to areas with more dark gray brown. The brightest yellow was in the vent area and undertail. The thin yellow eye ring was broken anteriorly and posteriorly. The primaries were a dark brown-black, but the wing coverts were dusky yellow brown. There was a faint thin bar on the median coverts and outer aspect of the greater coverts. The head was relative large and not round as I would expect in a Scarlet Tanager. There was a slight crest on the posterior crown that was not always evident. The bill was large, long, and pointed. The lower mandible was flesh colored and the upper mandible was dark. The eye and legs were dark. The bird appeared to be crunching and eating seeds.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: The overall coloration and plainness indicate a female or immature bird. The lack of prominent gray in the auriculars and light bill color argue against Hepatic Tanager. The bill length, head shape, and relative paleness of the wings favor Summer Tanager over Scarlet Tanager. The lack of prominent wing bars appears to exclude Western Tanager. The apparent lack of orange tint suggests a bird from the West or perhaps an immature. The Summer Tanager photographed at Pleasant Valley in Scott County on 2 December 1990 was more orange-yellow than the Iowa City bird. The latest Midwest record for Scarlet Tanager in books of these states was 26 Nov in Minnesota. There are a few winter records of Summer Tanager: in Tennessee (4) 5, 18, 21 Dec and 2 Feb-15 Mar; in Michigan 1 Dec; in Missouri 3-10 Jan 1987. There are also winter records from Florida and the Texas Coast. This does not constitute an exhaustive search for winter records.

Any one have reservations?: The bird was reported as a Scarlet Tanager, but Jim and I agree that it is a Summer Tanager.

Light: overcast, foggy; **Distance:** 20 feet (est.); **Optics:** 8x binocular

Previous experience: I have seen many tanagers, but have little experience separating basic females and immatures.

References before/after viewing: The above description was written before looking at any references. The comments were written after. Jim Fuller perceived the bird to be yellow-orange. I looked in various field guides and *Identification Guide to North American Passerines*. The Peterson guide illustrations seemed best to me. I also check state bird books for winter records.

Time of notes: none; **Final typing:** 2.0 to 2.5 hours (description typed, then checked references).

Addendum: I viewed the bird again on 10 Feb from 10:40 to 10:45 a.m. and took some photos. The bird appeared more orange-yellow today. I saw the lighter upper tail coverts and throat especially well. The face was plain without noticeably darker ear coverts. Most of the time the bird was facing away from me. It sat in the open, moved to another tree and preened, and then flew over the house without feeding. I waited 1 hour 10 minutes for it to show up.

Mary reported to me that she saw the bird last on 6 March /TK

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD

SPECIES: Summer Tanager

LOCATION: Backyard of Mary Noble, 3015 7th Avenue, Iowa City (Johnson Co.)

DATE & TIME: 9 February, 1998 (10:01-10:06 AM)

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

OTHERS: Reported as Scarlet Tanager by Mary Noble. Also seen by Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault

BACKGROUND: Mary Noble reported to me that she had what she thought was a Scarlet Tanager visiting her yard, feeder, and waterer irregularly since mid-January. I had tried to see the bird on two previous occasions without success, but on 9 February as I was standing in the backyard there, it appeared in a low limb of a tree only 20 feet away, and did not move for five minutes, until it flew out of the yard.

DESCRIPTION: General size was noticeably larger (20-25%) than the House Finch which was sitting about two feet away. The bird was generally a dull yellow color on its underparts and the upperparts were a dull brown color. Specifically, the underparts were an orange-yellow color, which was more orange on the upper breast, and less orange in the vent area. Features of the head and bill were most distinct. The head showed a crest, much like a flycatcher, most of the time, and the bill was quite large. It was thick at the base, relatively long, and pointed. The underside of the lower mandible was pinkish-orange and the upper mandible was gray. In fact, the head and bill profile were much like that of a Kingbird. The eye was dark and there was a prominent eyering. Although there was not a prominent auricular patch, that area of the head was darker. The legs were gray. The upperparts were a dull brown color and lacked any streaking. No wingbars were noted. No vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Lack of wingbars eliminates Western Tanager. Combination of large bill, prominent eyering, orange-yellow underparts, lack of prominent auricular patch, and brown not olive upperparts should eliminate Hepatic and Scarlet Tanagers.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was mid-morning of an overcast, even slightly foggy day. However, the bird was only 20 feet away, and I was using Swift Audubon binoculars (8.5 X 44).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen several female Summer Tanagers in southeast Iowa.

REFERENCES & FIELD GUIDE: I made notes in the car immediately after sighting. I later looked at both National Geographic and Peterson Field Guides. This form was typed on 11 February.