

DOCUMENTATION

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*)

Observed in Sioux Center on June 8, 1997

My living room window and several bedroom windows look out over a shrubby area under a row of tall box elders. Woodbine, vinca, and violets grow here in the shade, but there are open leaf-littered spots. On June 1 I observed a Gray-cheeked Thrush and a Swainson's Thrush together in this area. So they offered an excellent comparison. The Swainson's was gone the next day.

On Sunday morning June 8 I looked out of my window and, to my surprise, saw another Swainson's Thrush. Identification was immediate and positive. The bird was on the ground, about 6 feet away. Its upperparts (including tail) was an even olive brown. The breast was spotted, turning to stripy spots along the sides of the breast. The belly was clear. A buff hue over the upper breast was clearly visible. The bird had a distinct buffy eye-ring in a buffishy-tainted face. The bird allowed close inspection. At one point it was on a log in good light. I called my wife (who, though not a lister, is a keen birder), and my teenage daughter, who is also up on birds. Together we studied the bird and noted all the field marks.

We ruled out the

- Gray-cheeked Thrush: The eye-ring and buff on face and upper breast were unmistakable.
- Veery: The spots on the breast were bold and clear, and the upper parts showed no tan or reddish hue.
- Wood Thrush: The underparts were clear -- no heavy round spots like the Wood thrush, and no reddish upperparts.
- Hermit Thrush: No reddish tail, and no sign of the characteristic tail-wagging.

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Note: It seems odd to be writing a documentation for a bird that was abundant here only a few weeks ago!

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