

## DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Gray-cheeked Thrush; Number: 1

Location: Hickory Hill Park, Iowa City, Johnson Co., IA

Date: 25 Apr 1994; Time: 7:45-7:48 a.m.

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

Others before/with/after: none

Habitat and circumstances: Wood areas with paths.

Description of bird: I noticed a thrush on the path ahead of me and watched it there and in the nearby understory for several minutes. It was an overall gray thrush, lacking the warm buff of a Swainson's or rusty of a Hermit. I concentrated on the tail color as the bird moved on the path and on twigs in the understory. If anything, the tail seemed grayer than the body; I never noticed any rusty color to the tail. I also tried to see the face as well as I could. There appeared to be a faint white (not buff) eye ring. The auricular area was grayer than the rest of the head. Head-on, the upper breast had fairly heavy and quite gray streaking. From the side, the breast and flanks had only indistinct streaks. There was a thin white line on the lower leading edge of the wing between the breast and the wing. This may have been present on only one side. The belly and under tail appeared plain and light gray.

Voice: I did not hear any call notes.

Similar species: I consider any thrush before May 1 to be a Hermit until proven otherwise. I realize how difficult it is to tell these thrushes apart. I have not seen any Hermits in six days of birding over the last two weekends. We have had three warm nights with south winds that have brought early migrants to Iowa. I records six 1st, 2nd, or 3rd early dates the last two days in southeastern Iowa. In spite of this, I tried to make this bird into a Hermit Thrush. I believe I saw the tail enough times and at enough angles to determine that it wasn't rufous. The face pattern did not in any way suggest to me that this was a Swainson's. I find that the density of breast streaking is difficult to judge even on specimens.

Any one have reservations?: NA

Light: overcast; Distance: 25-40 feet; Optics: 10x binocular

Previous experience: I have studied many of these thrushes, but often find them difficult to judge.

References before/after viewing: none before field notes; before typing, I looked at several field guides and Zimmer to see if I could have noted any other field marks. The master guide shows a photo of one Gray-cheeked Thrush with slight white line on the wing, but I don't know if this means anything.

Time of notes: immediately after I lost the bird; Final typing: 3 hours

Addendum, 28 Apr 1994: I forgot to mention that this bird did not exhibit tail flicking. On 27 Apr 1994, Jim Fuller, Dick Tetrault, and I saw another Gray-cheeked Thrush in northeastern Louisa County. It was similar to the bird described above except for even less eye ring. It was very plain gray and did not flick its tail. We had excellent views at very close range.