

DOCUMENTATION FOR RARE BIRD SIGHTING IN IOWA

Matthew Kenne 709 N. Phillips, Algona, Iowa 50511

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)  
at birdbath in my backyard, 5 Nov 1999  
5:05 PM (dusk) for about 1 minute at approx. 30 ft. distance  
I used unenhanced vision for the observation.

Quotes are from notes written 30 minutes after sighting, without consulting references. Parenthesis contain additions and clarifications made when writing documentation 24 hours later without consulting references.

The bird was perched opposite a male Cardinal, perpendicular to my view and drinking. The bird was "smaller than (the) Cardinal". I estimated the bird to be about 1 inch shorter than the Cardinal. It was "yellowish (a dull or brownish yellow), with a rusty reddish tinge to the uppertail (coverts) and undertail (coverts)". It had a "slightly darker back". It had "no wingbars" and a "plain body and head with no pattern". It had a "pale bill /horn?" that was "thickish and blunt, but longer /not finch-like". The "leg color (was) not seen". It had a "slightly peaked head, but no crest like (the) Cardinal".

The thick, blunt bill shape and larger bill size eliminates warblers and vireos, and it was a larger bird than those by comparison with the Cardinal. Female Scarlet Tanager is eliminated by the lack of olive tones to the plumage, especially in the wing, which was the same color as the back and not darker. The reddish tinge to the yellow on parts of the bird is consistent with some female Summer Tanagers, but not Scarlet Tanager.

I've only seen a couple of female Summer Tanagers in Mexico, but Scarlet Tanagers nest in my area.

Sunday November 7, 1999

The bird was seen again briefly at the birdbath at 7:50 AM this morning as my family was leaving the house. The only addition I would make after this observation is that "blunt" is not a good description of the bill, it does have an obviously sharp point. I meant blunt in that the bill doesn't taper evenly and narrowly down to a fine tip as in a warbler.