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Dear Ken,

Thanks for your (prompt) response to our documentations from the spring period. I know how much time it takes to provide a response, so it is especially appreciated.

The Red Knot was seen on 12 May not 12 April. The correct date appears on the field notes and handwritten part; also he called me that night. Peter Ernzen is a young man who works as a naturalist for Ida and Monona counties. He has been birding a lot in the last few years, but is relatively isolated in western Iowa. I was impressed by the detail he relayed to me on the phone. I should have been able to identify the bird from his description, because I had reported two Red Knots from Riverton A. in 1992 in early May. They were also in basic plumage. After he told me what he thought this bird was, I realized that I had had a similar experience just two years ago. I had the advantage of having seen many Red Knots and having others there to look at them with me. Without knowing Ernzen and having a previous experience with Red Knots in spring which were still in basic plumage, I likely would have rejected this record. But, I do think he has identified this bird correctly. I wrote in my Records Committee comments, "Interesting account of a good birder's first encounter with a new species in basic plumage." I'm sure his next encounter will produce a much clearer and cleaner documentation.

As to the Fish Crow .... The closest records that I found without searching recent issues of *American Birds*, *The Meadowlark*, and *The Bluebird*, were in Bohlen and in Robbins and Easterla. In Illinois, the closed records were from Mason Co. (just below Peoria and just south of Iowa) and from Pike Co. (halfway between Iowa and St. Louis). In Missouri, the closed was in Pike Co. (which is opposite Pike Co. Illinois). It seems to me that expansion to southern Indiana and southwest Missouri may suggest some extension of this species, but extrapolation to a northward movement to Louisa County Iowa is a little tenuous. We have, however, long considered this to be a likely species to be found in Iowa. I once thought that Swainson's Warbler, might come north along the Mississippi, but the data do not support that, although there apparently are a few spring overshoots as far as Chicago.

Back to the Fish Crow ... I think the ID needs to stand on

its own after we have agreed that it is almost an "expected" bird. I cannot predict what the Records Committee will do with this record, nor will I be sure that what they decide is correct. We had a previous report from 8 May 1991 of a Fish Crow within a few miles of this location. As with the current record, the observer was not a regular reporter but claimed to know this species. I have a few more reservations about this record. The observer described the first encounter but not the three additional encounters. Two regular reports claimed to have seen the bird (Petersen and Gerald White) -- both saw the bird at a location that was quite different and that was searched for days by other observers (including myself and Jim Fuller). Fuller said that he later found out that the bird was found on the river side of an island-like area, and he went there and didn't find it. White did not submit a documentation and Petersen did not hear the bird. Petersen's reputation for always seeing just the right things is legendary.

After much agony, I finally voted in favor of this record based on the call heard by two different observers in 1991 and 1994. The publicity from 1991 has created the impression that Fish Crow probably occurs in Iowa, so the 1994 observers could have had considerable bias. The other alternative is to hold these records and await the massive search that is likely to occur at that location next spring. Hope you can get to southern Indiana, too.

This was a tough batch of records. There is no way that we will ever have completed a Records Committee review before the field reports (Iowa or American Birds) go to press. My approach is to try for no false positive reports, realizing that there will be false negatives. I use *American Birds* a lot and am bothered by the good sightings that do not make it into this publication. There are, however, some that get cited that are turned down by the states, and this creates more of a problem.

I find myself on the other side of a close decision on the Clark's Grebe. I agree that the bill color is the most reliable mark in all seasons, but this mark is not easy to reliably evaluate. That is, if one can be sure of the mark, it is the most reliable mark. From my reading and experience, I think that the facial pattern is difficult in fall/winter, but much easier in spring. I suppose you could say that a bird in spring may have failed to molt to full alternate plumage. I have the feeling that Brewer saw the facial pattern very well in comparison with Western Grebe, and, based on this alone, the bird was a Clark's. He described the bill as "deep yellow." I don't know for sure what he meant by that or why he did not compare the bill color with the Western. Reading between the lines (which is not allowed), I'd guess he saw a difference in bill color. Marion "Shorty" Brewer is handicapped and confined to his

car or wheel chair. He has birded for many years. His documentations are usually sketchy. We have mentioned identification of Clark's Grebe many times in *Iowa Bird Life*, including an article that evaluates the field marks as they are generally recognized now; i.e., including significance of bill color. For me, the problem boils down this: If a person described the bill color correctly, I would be unsure as to whether this were accurate or influenced by knowing what should be seen. On the other hand, the facial pattern described by Brewer on a spring bird is very unlikely to be inaccurate, and, from what I know now, is very (very) unlikely to be seen on a Western Grebe in spring.

I agree with you entirely on the Swainson's Warbler. In my limited experience, I don't remember a rusty cap at all and the shape of the head and bill and behavior was far from an average warbler. I don't know John Mayfield. I hope we don't get more of these reports.

Glad to hear that you got to Iowa. If you get out this way again, let us know so that we can show you around.

Yes, Alaska was productive. I got 13 new species including first North American record for Lesser White-fronted Goose, seconds for Narcissus Flycatcher (Attu) and Asian Brown Flycatcher (Gambell). Also on Attu: Steller's Sea-Eagle, Olive Tree Pipit, Far Eastern Curlew, non-Common Snipe (Pintail/Swinoe's), and Spot-billed Duck. A third western US record for White-winged Tern and first western Aleutian record for Short-billed Dowitcher were also interesting. At Gambell we also got Common Ringed Plover. Nome greeted us with a Common Pochard. We were lucky to see Arctic Loon right away (but not again) and we had to work for Bluethroat and Bristle-thighed Curlew. My birding companions, Dick Tetrault and Russ Widner got 56 and 74 new birds, respectively.

Thanks again for you effort. Hope you are able to get to Alaska.

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