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Ron Goetz
909 S. Gore Ave.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

29 March 1990

Town Peterson
Bird Division
Field Museum of Natural History
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Town:

Sorry for the delay in getting the Illinois ~~Scrub~~ Jay information to you. I have enclosed copies of documentations by Robert Chapel, Elizabeth Chato, Joe Milosevich, and Jim Landing, as well as a copy of the article on the bird by Chapel and Chato. Notice that Landing apparently had November on his mind; substitute September (9) for each of his uses of November (11). Also enclosed are two 8X10 prints of the only known photographs of the bird, taken by Joe Milosevich. You are welcome to keep the documentations, but please return the photos to me.

As noted on the phone, anything you can tell us concerning the race and age of the bird, the propensity for dispersal of the species/races, whether the timing of the sighting is appropriate for a fall dispersal, and any other relevant factors you can think of would be most appreciated. Just how far would a Scrub Jay have to travel to get to Illinois and how does this distance compare to known distances traveled by Scrub Jays? There apparently was some movement of Scrub Jays noted in the fall of 1984 (see **American Birds**); are these dispersal flights related to food availability, weather, population pressure, or does anyone know? Also, do you know anything about the Canada record? (see Godfrey, **Birds of Canada**, 1986). What about the Kansas and Nebraska records (DeSante and Pyle, **Distributional Checklist of North American Birds**)?

Your help on this matter is most appreciated and will be gratefully acknowledged in the Committee's report.

Best wishes,



Ron Goetz
Secretary

Illinois Ornithological Records Committee

22 Apr. 1990

Dear Ron;

Sorry to take so long in responding to your letter of 10 April, but I've been travelling a bit, and am now in Florida with an hour to spare.

I've looked at the photos, descriptions, and articles. I can't add too much to your identification. It's pretty definitely not a Florida bird, given that none of the observers reported a white forehead. As to interior vs. California Scrub Jay, they seem to agree on interior, based on overall intensity of coloration. It seems reasonable, but a worn-plumaged California jay doesn't look too contrasting either, so I'm not sure. What's more, Milosevich says that the belly was "dirty white" not light gray as in the interior birds. I guess for safety, it would be best to leave the California-interior question unresolved. The first photo is unconvincing, but the second is pretty clearly a SJ.

As to age, almost all individuals collected outside the species' range or in odd habitats have been second-summer birds. These are recognizable in hand only by patterns of plumage wear. About dispersal abilities in western birds, they have no organized movements, but there are a number of records of wanderers at least a couple of hundred miles from home (i.e., crossing the Mohave Desert in southern California). September through December ^{or January} would be the most likely time. This record would be the longest known dispersal event known in the species.

The nearest western populations would be in the Front range of the Rocky Mountains, curving down through the Albuquerque area, the Guadalupe + Davis Mtns in western Texas, and the Edwards Plateau in central Texas. The little wandering that takes place is in fall + winter — doesn't seem to be any periodicity to it, and it's not really concentrated enough to analyze. Nevertheless, there do seem to be big years for movement especially in the Colorado River basin in southern AZ and CA.

As regards records in Kansas + Nebraska, the Kansas records are part of the normal breeding range, which touches the SW corner of KS, and the W end of OK. Their range comes really close to western Nebraska, and given that Piñon Jays range into western Nebraska, it seems reasonable that STs could too. As for Canada, there is a record for British Columbia, which is an extralimital from the northernmost point in the species' range (near Portland, OR).

As for Phillips' book. In general, my advice is avoid it. He is an old school taxonomist with very unique opinions about subspecies. A much more widely accepted general reference is the 1957 AOU checklist. For Aphelocoma jays, there is an excellent summary of distribution + variation by Frank A. Rielka, 1951. Speciation and ecologic distribution in American jays of the genus Aphelocoma. Univ. California Publs. in Zoology 50(3): 195-464. This work he amended slightly in 1965 or 1967 (Cantor), but nothing changed that was important to the situation at hand. Anyhow, let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Town Peterson

Ron Goetz
909 S. Gore Ave.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

31 May 1990

Town Peterson
Bird Division
Field Museum of Natural History
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Town:

Many thanks for all the information on Scrub Jay identification, populations, and dispersals in relation to the Illinois record. I just wish you could tell us with complete certainty whether we should accept the record for the official state list!

After looking at the latest *American Birds*, I have one more question regarding the race of the bird. Given a non-Florida bird, how reliable is the presence or absence of a conspicuous white supercilium extending well behind the eye as an indicator of whether the bird comes from California or the interior (see Kaufman, *American Birds* 44:5-6)? The difference seems quite distinctive in the handful of photos I've tracked down, but would it still work in a worn bird? Would this make a difference for the Illinois record? None of the observers mention this mark and I suspect it would have shown up in the better of the two photos had it been as conspicuous as in some of the California birds. Notice that this difference is not discussed (nor even illustrated very well) in the National Geographic guide, which is what the observers were relying on to place the bird to race. Let me know what you think.

I can understand your advice about Phillip's book -- I don't necessarily mind unique opinions, but his vituperative rhetoric makes the book nearly unusable, at least for an amateur such as myself. Also, I was amused that you referred me to the 1957 A.O.U. Check-list; the sad fact is that it is such a useful book that the Washington University Library's copy of it has apparently wandered off, to my continual aggravation. I suppose I'll eventually have to break down and try to find a copy at a used book store somewhere.

Thanks again for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Ron Goetz
Secretary
Illinois Ornithological Records Committee

FIELD MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY

10 July 1990

Ron Goetz
909 S. Gore Ave.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Dear Ron,

I just got back from Mexico and California, and found your letter waiting for me. It was nice to lend a hand with the Scrub Jay record.

The eyeline is indeed more pronounced in California birds, but only when you look at a big series of specimens. Any individual can have a very obvious or almost non-existent eyeline. I don't know if it's because of less contrast with the lighter blue, but it's not usually as obvious in interior birds as in California birds. However, in each there exists enough individual variation that I wouldn't rely on that field mark. Sorry.

Please let me know if I can help further in this or other matters.

Sincerely,

Town Peterson