

**IORC EVALUATION FORM**

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Fraker

**Date of review:** 9/30/18

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** A-S/E

**Comments:**

## IORC EVALUATION FORM

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Walter Marcisz

**Date of review:** 10-19-18

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** U-I

**Comments:** Again, no surprise that other Cassin's Vireo documentations might emerge on the coattails of the acceptance of Illinois's first well-documented Cassin's Vireo, and its subsequent addition to the official state list.

Photo #1 (submitted by Dennis Oehmke) appears to be a conventional transparency on which the color has degraded over time. As such, it does not really match up with the written descriptions. Kleen's Documentation #1 states "there was NO CONSPICUOUS YELLOW on the bird anywhere." To the contrary, Photo #1 shows a bright yellow supraloral, bright yellow secondaries, a bright yellow tail, and a yellowish vent & wing bars. Given this discrepancy, Photo #1 is not particularly useful, and I won't refer to it again. The printed version of the same photo (included in The Living Museum article "Cassin's Vireo Makes Rare Stop in Springfield") seems to be a much better match for the written descriptions since it lacks the strong yellow tones.

The documentations are well-written and mostly very supportive of an ID of Cassin's Vireo. On the downside, this is a non-singing fall season bird. On the upside, Bohlen states that there was "no evidence of molt or worn feathers." Bohlen goes on to say that he has seen 1,940 Blue-headed Vireos and that he knew immediately that this bird was not a Blue-headed Vireo. These are impressive statements that inspire a lot of confidence, but just to be cautious I decided to check the Surfbirds article "Identification Summary of Blue-headed and Cassin's Vireos":

[http://www.surfbirds.com/Features/Solitary\\_Vireos/identification.html](http://www.surfbirds.com/Features/Solitary_Vireos/identification.html)

This article does include at least a few photos of apparent Blue-headed Vireos with very little head/back contrast, and little contrast between the throat and malar/auriculars, which is a bit sobering. Even more sobering is the article's statement that "a classic Cassin's has a thin grayish edge to the outer rectrix and a classic Blue-headed has a thick white outer rectrix," although the article then goes on to say "this feature is not necessarily iron-clad." Bohlen's documentation states: "The tail looked dark and the outer web of the outer tail feather was whitish. This could be seen both dorsally and ventrally." The Living Museum photo seems to support Bohlen's description of the tail. How much weight should we put on this characteristic? I don't know. For now, I have nagging doubts, so best that I vote to reject during this circulation. Perhaps more light will be shed on some of these issues during future circulations.

## **IORC EVALUATION FORM**

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** McMullen

**Date of review:** 10-19-18

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** A-E (photo)

**Comments:**

Bohlen and Kleen, very experienced birders, provide excellent details, plus, the photo is excellent documentation.

## **IORC EVALUATION FORM**

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Adam Sell

**Date of review:** 10/20/18

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** U-I

**Comments:** There just isn't enough in the photos to allow me to accurately assess the plumage details needed to separate Blue-headed from Cassin's. The more I've looked at basic-plumaged varieties of both, the more complex I can see the ID becoming.

## **IORC EVALUATION FORM**

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Douglas Stotz

**Date of review:** 24 October 2018

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** U-I

**Comments:** I think I have to vote against this record. I think the photo is unidentifiable. The written document clearly indicates a dull Solitary Vireo, but I don't see anything in the description provided that argues for a Cassin's Vireo rather than a dull or worn Blue-headed Vireo. I think Cassin's Vireo should be olive on back and head at least to some degree, and these descriptions refer to the bird as gray on both back and head. That to me argues for a dull Blue-headed of some sort. The lone thing that gives me pause is Dave Bohlen saying he knew immediately that it was not a Blue-headed Vireo. I appreciate his skill and experience, but I think we need more. To be honest, I am not sure that a silent bird out of range can be certainly identified as a Cassin's Vireo. It works better in the other direction where bright Blue-headed Vireos can be outside the range of Cassin's.

**IORC EVALUATION FORM**

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Paul Sweet

**Date of review:** 10/28/18

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** A-S(2)

**Comments:**

## IORC EVALUATION FORM

**Record #:** 2000-083

**Name of bird form:** Cassin's Vireo

**Committee member name:** Geoffrey A. Williamson

**Date of review:** 16 September 2018

**Circulation number:** 1st

**Vote:** A-S(2)

**Comments:**

This is a tough one. In favor of accepting is that two high quality observers spent a good bit of time with the bird, looked carefully at several of the main features that are necessary to distinguish this from similar species, formulated good arguments for their identification based on the observations, and felt that the bird was unlike the familiar Blue-headed Vireos with which they had a lot of experience. Supportive is the photograph, though it would be difficult to clinch the identification from the photo alone. I understand that some individuals feel that the photo casts some doubt cast on identification as Cassin's. However, I don't find anything strongly contradictory, and it shows reasonably well the important point about contrast (or lack thereof) between head and back.

In Birch (2018), seven features are mentioned to be important in this identification. These are listed below, together with comments about what Kleen's and Bohlen's documentations say about them with respect to this bird.

FEATURE	Kleen's description	Bohlen's description
Throat/malar contrast	Notes lack of strong demarcation between cheek and throat	No explicit mention
Flank coloration	"cream"/"off-white" sides, small greenish area on flanks near legs	Greenish-gray flank patch, with yellow wash from rear of flank patch to and across vent.
Back coloration	Light gray back, light gray head, no contrast between them.	Olive or grayish back with little or no contrast between back and head.
White outer tail feathers	Light, narrow feather edges visible.	"The tail looked dark and the outer web of the outer tail feather was whitish. This could be seen both dorsally and ventrally."
Color and contrast of lores	No explicit comment.	No explicit comment.
Supraloral	No explicit comment.	No explicit comment.
Bill color	Light colored with darker tip.	Blue-gray with blackish tip.

Kleen's description seems supportive for Cassin's in the first four points and equivocal in the remaining three. Bohlen's description seems supportive for Cassin's in points two and three, possibly favors Blue-headed in point four, is equivocal in five and six, and is hard to determine in point seven.

I tried to assess these points from the photo. It is tough to assess the cheek/throat boundary, but I think it works better for Cassin's with no sense of sharp demarcation. Flank coloration in the photo is also hard to assess, but again I think it favors Cassin's because there is an evenness to the underparts coloration that corroborates the written detail about there being no strong coloration there. The head/back contrast appears absent in the photo, supporting Cassin's. Color of the lores is darkly contrasting with the cap, supporting Cassin's (see below vis-à-vis Roberson's web site). The supraloral in the photo is flaring, but I can't tell if it blends or contrasts with the forehead, so this is equivocal in my view. The bill color seems not to be strongly blue at the base, so this is not a point in favor of Blue-headed (though also not really in favor of Cassin's).

It is also worth noting that Don Roberson (2002) has suggested that the degree of contrast between the dark line through the lores and the cap may be important, with this line being darker, as it is with the Sangamon County individual, serving as an indication of Cassin's over Blue-headed. This is said by Birch to be connected to their feature five above, but I'm not sure if they are talking clearly about the same thing.

I am impressed in looking at photos on the web, including those in Birch's SurfBirds piece, about how difficult these identifications can be. But on balance, I am swayed by the favorable points in favor of accepting that I noted in my first paragraph above. This is a judgment call, but I am willing to accept given there being two written documentations, a supportive photograph, and other observers who were supportive of the identification (though not committing those views to written documentation).

#### Literature cited:

Birch, A. (2018). Identification summary of Blue-headed and Cassin's vireos. SurfBirds, [http://www.surfbirds.com/Features/Solitary\\_Vireos/identification.html](http://www.surfbirds.com/Features/Solitary_Vireos/identification.html), April 2018 (accessed 16 September 2018).

Roberson, D. (2002). Some thoughts on the "Solitary Vireo" complex. <http://creagrus.home.montereybay.com/sovi-id-comm.html>, created 23-24 May 2002 (accessed 16 September 2018).