

DOCUMENTATION FORM FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

This form is submitted as supporting documentation of an Unusual species

1. Cassin's Vireo

2. 1 male

3 May 18, 2000

4. Waterfall Glen FP (southeast section where Sawmill Creek goes under the RR tracks) in DuPage county.

5. Bob Fisher, [REDACTED]

no other observers were present

6. An obvious small vireo like bird. Size was difficult to estimate but it was clearly smaller than a nearby Red-eyed Vireo. Whitish 'spectacles'. Crown and sides of head/face were a drab grayish brown color; there was essentially no contrast between the head and the mantle/back coloration. This gray drab coloration extended onto the wings and uppertail. The overall effect was of uniformly colored upperparts. 2 somewhat indistinct grayish white wing bars were present. The throat, breast and belly were dull white; there was only a slight wash of yellow on the flanks. The undertail coverts were dull white. Legs and bill were dark.

7. Feeding, moving slowly through a small hawthorn. Occasionally stopped to sing (6 times in the 3 minutes I had it under observation)

8. The bird's song was what first caught my attention, before I saw it. My first impression was the raspy quality of a Yellow-throated Vireo, but with longer pauses between phrases. Then when I saw it, my first thought was 'Blue-headed Vireo with a sore throat', before I began to study it more carefully. In tempo the song was similar to a Blue-headed, but with a raspy, burry quality I have never heard in this species.

9. A RR and powerline right of way bordered by scrubby trees on the south side; the north side (where the bird eventually moved to) is an oak, cherry, hickory forest bordering the creek on both sides.

10. B&L 10x42 Elites. Viewing distance was about 25 feet (paced off). The bird was observed for about 3 minutes at 8AM. Weather was partly cloudy; while observing the bird the sun was at a perfect angle, over my left shoulder. The foliage on the hawthorn was relatively sparse and the bird foraged/sang out near the end of the branches.

11. I've seen Cassin's Vireo only once before, while on a visit to SE Arizona. Many, many sightings (and listening to their song) of Blue-headed Vireos here in Illinois and in N Wisconsin where I have observed them on their breeding territories. A few sightings of Plumbeous Vireos in SE Arizona. We frankly did not pay too much attention to these other members of the Solitary Vireo complex at the time (before split)

12. The whitish spectacles and whitish throat eliminate all Vireos except the Solitary Vireo complex. The song quality plus the field marks described above eliminates Blue-headed Vireo. Plumbeous Vireo is larger and grayer, usually lacks the yellow wash on the flanks and does not have the drab gray brown upperparts this bird possessed.

13. No photos were obtained.

14. 3rd ed. Geo and Thayer's Birds of NA CD-ROM (specifically to hear the song, compared to Blue-headed and Plumbeous). I also posted the sighting on IBET, asking for comments/references on previous sightings. Marcisz and others referred me to the Clyne sighting in Vol. 3 #4 of the Meadowlark.

15. Field notes were made when I got back to the car, about 15 minutes after the sighting.

16. This form was completed 4 days after the sighting.

17. Close distance observation of this bird coupled with the distinctive song quality convince me of the ID, but I would welcome the opportunity to examine skins of the Solitary Vireo complex and evaluate plumage variations, esp. between Cassin's and Plumbeous.

Robert E. Fisher May 22, 2000

Subj: IBET: Cassin's Vireo? at Waterfall Glen FP

Date: 5/18/2000 10:08:32 PM Central Daylight Time

From: [REDACTED]

Sender: owner-ibet@lists.enteract.com

To: IBET@lists.enteract.com

While standing this AM (Thursday) on the footbridge (just north of the RR tracks at the south end of the Service Rd along the east side of the creek from the Bluff Rd entrance) watching/listening to a Chat singing his heart out, I heard a very slow paced raspy song which sounded like a Yellow-throated Vireo. I immediately saw the bird in a small tree just on the

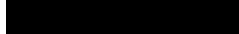
west side of the creek, and quickly said to myself "Blue-headed Vireo" with a sore throat. I hadn't seen one for several days.

But then, looking closer, I was struck by how drably colored the bird's head was, with very little contrast with the back/mantle. It also had white wing bars, and just a faint wash of yellow along the flanks. I watched the bird for about 3 minutes as it slowly foraged along the branches; the light was excellent and the bird sang several times during this period, always the same deliberate, somewhat raspy 'vireo' song. I was now thinking one of the other races/species of the Solitary vireo complex. But which one? The bird finally flew north along the creek and I lost sight and sound of it. Walking back to the car, I was wishing it had appeared last Saturday on our outing so a group of birders had seen it. Only after looking at the 3rd ed. Geo did I conclude it might have been a Cassin's.

Since this split is relatively recent, are there any records for Cassin's type Solitary's from past years here in Illinois. Any specimens in the Field Museum trays? Is the Cassin's known as a vagrant?

Regards

Bob Fisher


Downers Grove (DuPage county) IL