

**WESTERN TANAGER AT JACKSON PARK, CHICAGO (COOK CO.), ILLINOIS
20 MAY 2012**

I was one of two birders to observe a female Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) immediately west of the Clarence Darrow Memorial Bridge northeast of Wooded Island in Chicago's Jackson Park on the morning of 20 May 2012. My observation was brief (less than 10 seconds) but diagnostic. The other observer, whose name I do not know, had an even briefer view a few minutes after my initial sighting; he concurred with the identification. Time of observations was sometime between 06:10 and 06:20 CDT.

Skies were sunny on the morning of observation, but turned cloudy in the afternoon, with a brief shower. Winds that morning and the previous couple of days were light out of the SSE, but they shifted to WSW at 10-20 mph later in the day, and NNE the following day, with a 20°F drop in temperatures between 20 May and 21 May.

Distance of observation was perhaps 30 feet, with the bird perched some 15-20 feet above ground in a small-leaved tree (a locust of some sort, I believe), and angle of observation provided good views of the head and underparts (including undertail coverts and undertail), but only a quarter-view or so of the wings, and no views of the upperparts. The bird was observed in sunlight, with sun at my back. Optical equipment was a pair of Nikon 8x42 binoculars.

Description. Size of Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*); see below. Entire underparts (throat through undertail coverts), unremarkable yellow—rather like a female Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) or female Orchard Oriole. The yellow throat graded to bright olive on the rest of the head, which was plain (i.e., no contrastive malar streak, transocular stripe, supercilium, or visible crown stripes). My view was primarily from below, but about a quarter of the left wing was visible; this was dull black with an obvious white wing-bar (by position, along the primary coverts). Tail from below, black, notched. Bill, thick and blunt with an obviously decurved culmen (i.e., tanager-like), rather bright fleshy orange, but dusky along the culmen. Legs, not visible. Feet, black. Upperparts (back, rump, tail), not seen. Behavior was tanager-like: posed rather upright, with little movement while perched, but it soon flew behind me, evidently to a nearby tree where the second anonymous observer spotted it a few minutes later. That observer mentioned two wing-bars, but no details on their coloration.

Relevant background information. I first noticed this bird while searching for an Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) that I heard singing in an adjacent tree. My initial view was of a bird that was the right size for Orchard Oriole, with uniformly yellow underparts, quite as in female Orchard Oriole, and my first split-second assumption was that the bird was a female Orchard Oriole accompanying the male that I'd heard singing. However, I dismissed that species immediately upon noticing the bill structure, which indicated a tanager. That, combined with the strong white wing-bar, prompted my identification as Western Tanager, prior to consulting any field guides. I was aware at the time of identification that Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) sometimes shows a weak pale wing-bar, but that a strong white wing-bar is not expected in that species.

Discussion. Despite the fact that views were brief, and that the full gamut of useful details was not visible (in particular, the upperparts were not seen, and I couldn't vouch for a wing-bar on the greater coverts from my angle of observation), the combination of observed details appears to be diagnostic of Western Tanager. In particular, the combination of uniformly yellow underparts (including the undertail coverts); thick, blunt, fleshy orange bill with a dusky, decurved culmen; blackish wings with a striking white wing-bar; and black, notched tail should serve to eliminate all naturally occurring candidates for potential confusion.

In the field I consulted the compact 2003 Sibley *Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*, which has a plate of a "pale adult" female, which was a poor match to the bird seen in the field on two features: the extensively pale grayish white belly (as opposed to the wholly yellow underparts) and the notably pale pinkish-horn bill (as opposed to bright fleshy orange as noted in the field). On returning home, I googled photos of Western Tanager and consulted the larger 2000 Sibley *Field Guide to Birds* as well as Pyle et al.'s 1987 *Identification Guide to North American Passerines*, which indicated that the differences noted fell within the normal range of variation for females of this species. The plate of the "bright adult" female Western Tanager in the 2000 Sibley guide provides a good match to the Jackson Park bird. Sibley 2000 calls attention to bill color as "more orange than Scarlet [Tanager]," and indeed the bill color served as a flag in the field as being unlike any Scarlet Tanager that I had ever seen.

I tape-recorded details immediately after the observation; these details form the core of this documentation, which was prepared the morning of 21 May. The present draft was edited on 23 May 2012.

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