





Alan's REVISION #1
738-01-1997

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Notes on Townsend's Warbler

19 Dec. 1997

LOCATION: In privately-owned suburban yard (Robin Figlin, R.R. 3, Drums, Pa. 18222) in Butler Township, Luzerne County.

WHEN: This bird was first seen by Robin Figlin in her yard in early December 1997 and was confirmed as a Townsend's Warbler by Alan C. Gregory and John Heuges on 17 Dec., 1997. Further corroborating observation was accomplished on Dec. 19, 1997 by Jim Hoyson, Doug Gross and Rick Koval. Jim Hoyson took a series of photos (color slides) of the bird while Rick Koval was able to get a few minutes of videotape documentation. I also took several color slide photos. All photography, including Robin's, was accomplished through the window of her trailer.

I was notified by Robin Figlin via telephone that an odd warbler was visiting her backyard feeding station. I was not at home when she first called on Monday, 15 Dec. (at the urging of her friend, Carol Kingsley, who receives the North Branch Bird Club's newsletter), so Robin left a lengthy message on our answering machine in which she patiently described the bird's appearance and behavior. At this point, I knew there was a good chance that we had a vagrant warbler at hand and that it could be one of two or three species based on Robin's telephonic description. Robin sounded knowledgeable and informed and this feeling was justified upon meeting her and reading her field notes. I then returned Robin's call through Carol Kingsley and Robin called me that evening while I was at work in Hazleton. We talked for several minutes and she promised to photograph the bird the following day (16 Dec.), which she did. We then made arrangements for me to come to her house on Thursday, 18 Dec., to observe the bird.

On 18 Dec., John Heuges and I went over to Robin's house (which is about four miles from our house in Conyngham Borough) to observe the bird. We arrived at 1215 and were able to observe the warbler just a few minutes after arrival. The bird was visiting a plastic silo-type feeder with a catch tray attached to the bottom. Robin had the feeder hung from an interior branch of a large Norway spruce immediately outside the window at the back of her trailer home. The feeder is about 5 feet off the ground and is kept filled with black oil sunflower seed. It is three to four feet away from the window and nearly all observing was done with the naked eye since binoculars were useless in such tight quarters and were unnecessary to get a detailed look at the bird through the window. We later provided shelled sunflower seed and a chunk of suet to Robin to ease her mind regarding the availability of food for the bird. A bell-shaped feeder with black oil sunflower seeds is hung about 12 inches away from the other feeder and between it and the tree's trunk. Other species noted during this observation period and our follow-on visit on Friday, Dec. 19, included Slate-colored Junco, Black-capped Chickadee, House Sparrow, House Finch, White-

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breasted Nuthatch and Downy Woodpecker. Robin's yard is bordered on the north by mature blue spruces. Her trailer home is aligned east-to-west with the feeding station at the east end of the trailer. The follow-on visit of Friday, Dec. 19, was accomplished at about 0930. We watched the bird for about 15 minutes on the first visit. The follow-up observation session lasted for about 60 minutes.

Based on the initial observations and the follow-up visit of Friday, 19 Dec., I recorded the following field notes.

The warbler was in fresh fall plumage with no indications of worn feathers. Its bill was black. A bold, triangular-shaped black patch centered on the eyes adorned both sides of the head and really stood out on the first look at the bird. This black area (which nearly enclosed the eyes) began just in front of the eyes and was bordered by strong yellow plumage (median lines). The crown was dark. There was a slight hint of yellow at the bottom of the eyes but no complete eye ring. A thin black line started at the rear corner of each facial mask and appeared to up and over the nape/upper back. The back was olive green with faint black markings throughout. These markings were clearly evident upon looking down at the bird as it foraged immediately below the window, and were aligned in head-to-tail fashion. This plumage then melded into a grayer and darker rump and tail area. The bird's sides were yellow with dark streaking. The chest was bright yellow. The throat was blackish and this plumage then transitioned into the streaking along the bird's sides. Two white bars were prominent on each wing. The bird did not wag its tail at any time. The bird was larger than a chickadee but not as plump as a junco. On the initial visit of Thursday, Dec. 18, the bird stayed close to the feeder but on the follow-up visit it also foraged extensively among the lower branches of the Norway spruce. It also went down to the ground, seemingly in search of fragments of sunflower seeds. The bird's visits to the feeder seemed to coincide, most of the time, with those of chickadees and juncos.

The black facial mask and yellow median stripes clearly distinguished the bird apart from the Yellow-rumped Warbler and served to clinch its identity as a Townsend's Warbler. This bird also did not have a rump patch and did not have any hint of the male yellow-rump's winter plumage. Upon seeing Robin's photos of the bird, Doug Gross remarked that he didn't even have to see the bird to know that it was a Townsend's Warbler. The thin black bill, streaking on the sides and bright yellow plumage on the chest clearly distinguished it as a warbler, but it was the bold black, triangular-shaped facial mask that marked it as a Townsend's Warbler and this was the most striking feature of the bird. The weather conditions on the initial visit were: clear, sunny, temperature in the middle 40s, with a slight breeze. The weather conditions on the follow-up visit were: overcast but clearing, temperature in the low 40s and rising and a west wind of 5-10 mph.

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We asked Robin before departing her home on 19 Dec. to record the bird's comings and goings, especially the last date of observation, and to recover and freeze the carcass should she find the bird dead later this winter.

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Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Coyneham, Luzerne Co., PA

15, February, 1998

Nick Pulcinella

Date: 15 February 1998

Location: Conygham, Luzerne Co, PA

Other Observers: Al Guarente and Jim Lockyer plus 4 others that I did not know.

Circumstances surrounding observation: The warbler had been present since 19 December 1997 but word of the bird's appearance was kept private until early February. I visited the area with Al Guarente and Jim Lockyer to see the bird. After about twenty minutes we saw the bird first perched on the stucco side of the house and then in the low bushes and on the ground in a sunlit area approx. 10m from where we were standing. I observed the bird with 7x42 binoculars with the sun shining directly onto the bird. It was in the company of a few Dark-eyed Juncos and a Song Sparrow. The bird was observed for approx. thirty minutes.

Description: A dendroica type warbler, generally yellow below and dark green above.

Upperparts: Dark green-brown crown that extended down the nape to the back. The back was an olive-green without any dark streaking. The wings were a dark greenish-brown and had two white wing-bars. The tail was also dark green-brown. The head had a prominent dark auricular area. There was a yellow supercillum..

Underparts: The throat and breast were a bright yellow with no black on the throat. The belly was white, flanks were a pale white-yellow with indistinct black streaking. The under-tail coverts were white and the outer tail feathers were visibly white when the bird flew.

Bare Parts: The bill was warbler like and appeared black and the eye was dark. The legs were dark.

Elimination of similar species: The presence of the dark auricular area eliminates Black-throated Green Warbler and Hermit Warbler, another likely vagrant during the winter season in the northeast.

Age/Sex: I think the lack of any black on the throat and lack of black streaking on the back would suggest this bird to be a first-fall female.

Report written from notes taken while observing the bird.

This is apparently the first record of this species this century (Santner 1992) though there is a single-observer record from Tyler Arboretum in Delaware Co., PA 17, November 1973 (Scott 1974)

References:

Scott, F.R., D. Cutler. 1974 Middle Atlantic Coast Region American Birds 28:36

Santner, S, D. Brauning, G. Schwalbe., P. Schwalbe. 1992. Annotated List of the Birds of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Biological Survey Contribution Number Four.

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Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Coyneham, Luzerne Co., PA

15, February, 1998

Nick Pulcinella

cc. **Files**
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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Townsend's Warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Date of Sighting: 17 December 1997 to 15 March 1998

Location: BUTLER

County: LUZERNE

Observer(s): Alan Gregory, John Heuss, Doug Gross, Jim Hoyson, Rich Koval

Nick Pulcinella, Al Guarente, Jim Lockyer, Alan Brady, Peter Robinson

Date of Submission: 1998

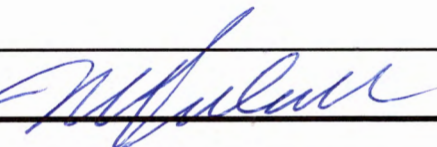
Submitted by: Alan Gregory, Jim Hoyson, Nick Pulcinella, Alan Brady, Peter Robinson

Written Description YES Photo YES SPECIMEN NO Recording Video

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman	X							
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess	X							
R. Ickes	X							
J. McWilliams	X							
B. Reid	X							
P. Rodewald	X							
TOTALS	6							1
DECISION	X							

Comments: 6/0/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

9/18/00