

782-03-1999

SPECIES: Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

DATE: 3 October 1999

TIME: 1000

LOCATION: Harrison Hills Park, Natrona Heights, Allegheny County

OBSERVER: Paul Hess, 1412 Hawthorne St., Natrona Heights PA 15065

WEATHER AND LIGHT: cloudy, 50s; dull lighting under woodland canopy

DISTANCE: 20 feet away and 1 or 2 feet above eye level

OPTICS: Leica 8x32 binoculars

BEHAVIOR: It was moving slowly southward through second-growth woodland along a stream, associated with a small loose flock of migrants that included 1 Swainson's Thrush, 1 Wood Thrush, 2 Tennessee Warblers, 2 Cape May Warblers, 3 Blackpoll Warblers, and 1 Scarlet Tanager. It perched directly in front of me at the end of a mid-level branch, giving me a clear side view for about 10 seconds before it continued leisurely through the woods.

DESCRIPTION:

General appearance: My immediate impression was of a yellow and black passerine about the same size and shape as a nearby Swainson's Thrush and Scarlet Tanager.

Plumage:

* Sides of face plus the entire underparts -- chin, throat, breast, flanks, belly, and undertail coverts -- were unmarked bright yellow.

* Wings: rich jet black with no brownish or grayish tinge. Two prominent wingbars: The upper, which would be the median coverts, was relatively wide and dull yellowish; the lower, which would be the greater coverts, was much narrower and white.

* Upperparts: I had no ideal straight-on view of the upper body, due to the bird's position slightly above eye-level, but the crown and nape looked dull greenish yellow, and the back seemed darker and dusky. I did not see the rump and upper tail coverts well enough to pin down any color.

* Tail: The retrices appeared to be dark slate on the upper side, not as rich black as the wings; the under side of the retrices were dusky and devoid of color.

Bill and legs: The bill was medium in length and depth, conspicuously tanager-like in size and shape. It was light but nondescript in color. The legs' color made no impression on me.

SEPARATION FROM SIMILAR SPECIES: In autumn the body plumage of a Scarlet Tanager, the only other tanager with black wings, would be bright olive green in the male, bright yellowish olive in the female, or dull olive in the first fall. No Scarlet would have entirely bright yellow underparts, no adult Scarlet would show wing bars, nor would the thin dull bars of a first-fall Scarlet be remotely as prominent as this bird's. In fact the combination of the wholly unmarked yellow face, the entire bright yellow underparts also unmarked, and the black wings with bright bars separated this bird from all other North and Central American tanager species.

Bill size and shape alone distinguished it clearly from all other species that might vaguely be considered similar. For example, a female oriole of any species would have an utterly different long thin bill, and a Pine Warbler's bill would be even smaller and thinner (not to mention a Pine's much smaller and slimmer overall size, sharp contrast between darkish cheek and bright throat, lack of jet-black wings, and whitish rather than bright yellow rear flanks, belly and undertail coverts).

DISCUSSION: I first saw the bird when it flew onto the end of a branch in the sub-canopy of saplings right in front of me. Its combination of bright yellow and black instantly looked so unusual that I said to myself out loud, "What the heck is that?" Within another instant the ID struck me as obvious, surprising as it was, and I quickly catalogued in my mind every detail I could see. Though the observation lasted only 10 seconds at most, the key features -- rich black wings and bright yellow face and entire underparts -- indicated that this was a definitive-basic male.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE SPECIES: Western Tanagers were common and familiar to me in all ages and plumages when I lived in southern California until my mid-teens. Since then I have seen dozens of both sexes in alternate plumage during six trips to the West, most recently in June-July 1999 in New Mexico. Though I have had no recent experience with the basic plumage, this bird looked no different to me than an adult male Western without the red head.

This report is written 4 October 1999 from notes made immediately after the observation.

Paul [Signature]

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviana*)

Date of Sighting: 3 October 1999 to 3 October 1999

Location: HARRISON HILLS PARK

County: ALLEGHENY

Observer(s): Paul Hess

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Paul Hess

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

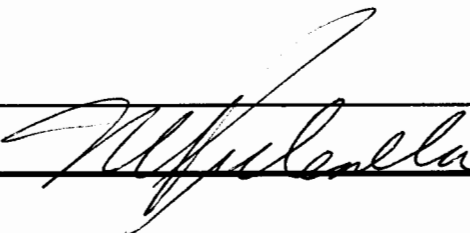
Specimen: No

Recording: Video

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Recording: Video			Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess			X					X
R. Ickes			X					
B. Reid			X					
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			6					1
DECISION			X					

Comments: 6/0/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

11/15/00