

861-02-1995

5 March 1995

Richard Williams
3 Parkside Drive
Hummelstown, PA 17036-9280

Dear Dick,

As per your request, I am describing the Brewer's Blackbird sighting I made yesterday, 4 March 1995.

I was out birding the southern section of Dauphin County. It was a cloudy day; temperatures were in the 30's F, and the wind was light and variable. I was making a loop off of PA 341 in the very southeasternmost corner of Dauphin County between 12 noon and 1 pm. I took T570 south from PA 341 and observed a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls and a couple of immature Herring Gulls in the farm field immediately south of PA 341. I continued south until T570 intersected Gretna Road. I turned right on Gretna Road and went east until it intersected Belaire Road. I turned north on Belaire and passed a farm house complex. There was a large flock of black birds just past this complex (it is also south of the PA Turnpike) and west of the road. The area was a strip of grass/lawn that extended in about 30 feet from the road. Some scattered trees were growing in the lawn area. A wooden fence separated the back edge of the grass from a farm field. The birds were primarily on the ground looking for food in the lawn and field. Some birds were perched on the trees. I stopped my truck on the east berm of Belaire and decided to check the flock of birds.

Most of the birds in the trees were Common Grackles and Starlings. Grackles, Starlings, and Red-winged Blackbirds were feeding on the ground in the grass and farm field. I estimate there were at least 300 Grackles, 200 Starlings and 50 Red-winged Blackbirds. I was scanning the flock to see if I could spot any other species when a couple of birds hopped from the ground onto the wooden fence. One was a Grackle. The other was clearly a smaller bird and that attracted me to check it out with my binoculars (10x50 Minoltas). They sat side by side on the fence and this made it easy to compare the two species. I was able to view the two birds for about two minutes before they flew back into the farm field to continue feeding. I lost track of the smaller bird at that time.

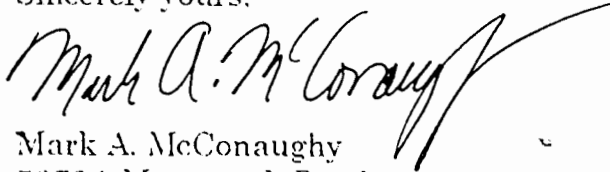
The smaller bird was a couple of inches smaller than the Grackle. It had a slightly smaller bill and the bill appeared to be narrower and straighter than that of the Grackle. The smaller bird had a decidedly purplish head sheen, similar to that of the Grackle. The smaller bird also had a yellow eye. From the neck to the tip of the tail, the smaller bird was a pure black. There was no evidence of any wing epaulets or any other markings on the body of

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the bird. The tail was at least an inch shorter than the tail of the Grackle. The tail also was flat and squared-off as opposed to that of the more fan-shaped V-tail of the Grackle. The legs of the smaller bird were also black. I decided the bird was either a Rusty or Brewer's Blackbird. The purplish head indicated it was a Brewer's Blackbird.

However, I had never seen a Brewer's Blackbird before and was uncertain what kind of color range and variation might be found in Rusty Blackbirds. I decided to check with other local birders, describe the bird to them and see what they thought. I called Grace Randolph and she was not certain if it was a Brewer's or a Rusty Blackbird. She did indicate that Rusty Blackbirds were more likely found by themselves in swampy areas, and this bird was not observed in a swampy area. I called you and you also indicated Rusty Blackbirds were more likely to be found in swampy areas. Don Henise was also contacted and he immediately thought I was describing a Brewer's Blackbird. He said that Rusty Blackbirds do not have purplish heads. The purplish head, its presence in a flock of other blackbirds, and not being observed in a swampy area all indicated to him the bird was a Brewer's Blackbird. Therefore, I feel my identification of the bird as a Brewer's Blackbird is correct.

Sincerely yours,



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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

Date of Sighting: 4 March 1995 to 4 March 1995

Location: BELAIRE RD

County: DAUPHIN

Observer(s): Richard Williams

Date of Submission: 1995

Submitted by: Richard Williams

Written Description: YES Photo: NO Specimen: NO

Recording: NONE

| Member | Class I | Class II | Class III | Class IV | Class V | | | Abstain |
|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|---|---|---------|
| | | | | | A | B | C | |
| F. Haas | | | X | | | | | |
| N. Pulcinella | | | X | | | | | |
| E. Kwater | | | X | | | | | |
| R. Ickes | | | X | | | | | |
| G. McWilliams | | | | X | | | | |
| P. Schwalbe | | | X | | | | | |
| S. Feldstein | | | X | | | | | |
| TOTALS | | | 6 | 1 | | | | |
| DECISION | | | X | | | | | |

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J. Haas

Date:

9-19-95