

861-01 -1998

**Ted Floyd, 10:27 PM 5/2/1998, BREWER'S BLACKBIRD DESCRIPTION**

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Return-Path: <ted@dept.english.upenn.edu>  
Delivered-To: pabirds@redrose.net  
Date: Sat, 2 May 1998 22:27:14 -0400 (EDT)  
From: Ted Floyd <ted@dept.english.upenn.edu>  
Subject: BREWER'S BLACKBIRD DESCRIPTION FOR P.O.R.C.  
To: Frank & Barb Haas <pabirds@redrose.net>

Hello, Frank. Here's a description of a Brewer's Blackbird that I saw two weeks ago at Tinicum.

Best, Ted

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This is a description of a ~~Rusty~~ <sup>Brewer's</sup> Blackbird (Euphagus cyanocephalus) that I saw in Philadelphia County PA on 17 April 1998.

It was fairly late in the afternoon (about 5:30 P.M.), and I was birding along the impoundment of John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum. I was near the "horseshoe area" of the impoundment, between the boardwalk and the observation tower.

I encountered another birder named Craig Berman. He had found a blackbird whose identify he was uncertain of, and he asked me to take a look. The bird was fairly close (within 20 meters) and it suggested a female Brown-headed Cowbird (Molothrus ater).

Upon examining the bird through 10x40 binoculars, however, it was clear that the bird was not a cowbird. The bill was completely wrong. Relative to a cowbird, this bird's bill was fairly long and rather sharply pointed. At this point, I was fairly certain it was a Brewer's Blackbird. Also, that was the tentative identification that Mr. Berman had arrived at, prior to my arrival. Therefore, we began to study the bird, paying particular attention to the its similarity with the Rusty Blackbird (E. carolinus).

SIZE. It is difficult to estimate body size in the field, but I felt the bird was easily the size of a Red-winged Blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus).

GENERAL APPEARANCE. The bird was clad all over in rather "cold" shades of tan and gray. The bird wasn't as pale or tan as a female Brown-headed Cowbird, but it seemed paler and grayer than a female Rusty Blackbird. Female Rusty Blackbirds can be variable at this time of year, but I think many or most of them are darker than the bird in question. I base this claim on my observations of a mixed-sexes flock of Rusty Blackbirds that I observed immediately following my encounter with the bird in question; also, some of the Rusty Blackbirds still showed traces of the warm rusty coloration that is more characteristic of autumn and winter birds. However, the bird in question exhibited none of these warm rusty tones.

## HEAD.

1. BILL. In my opinion, bill shape constitutes the most consistent difference between Rusty Blackbird and Brewer's Blackbird. The bill on a Brewer's Blackbird (and on the bird in question) is not quite as long as on a Rusty Blackbird. Moreover, a Rusty Blackbird's bill tends to be more finely tapered and more slender at the base than on a Brewer's Blackbird (and on the bird in question). Finally, the bill of a Rusty Blackbird is slightly (but often perceptibly) decurved, unlike the straight bill of the Brewer's Blackbird (and of the bird in question).

The above characteristics, though slight and subtle taken one at a time, combine to impart a shorter, blunter, and more conical bill shape on the Brewer's Blackbird than on the Rusty Blackbird. The bill on the bird I saw was an excellent match to what I have just described for Brewer's Blackbird.

2. EYES. The eyes were dark.
3. PLUMAGE. The overall facial patterns seemed more muted than on a Rusty Blackbird. The supercilium, although discernible, was not as striking as on an autumn or winter Rusty Blackbird. I noticed that some of the nearby female Rusty Blackbirds still had prominent rusty supercilia. The supercilium on the bird in question was not as colorful as on these female Rusty Blackbirds.

The bird had a faint, but discernible, malar stripe. The throat was lighter than the rest of the head, and seemed to be about the same shade and intensity as the supercilium.

4. JIZZ. The relatively short thick bill and the fairly muted (albeit discernible) plumage markings combined to impart a rather bull-headed look.

BEHAVIOR. The bird was active and tame, and it allowed very close approach. I never heard it call or sing. It didn't seem to associate closely with any other birds, but there were near-by flocks of Rusty Blackbirds and Myrtle Warblers.

## SEPARATION FROM SIMILAR SPECIES.

1. RUSTY BLACKBIRD. The eye color and bill shape were the best points of separation. The head shape and plumage provided additional, although more subjective, points of separation.
2. BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD. The bill was not as conical, chunky, and short as on a Brown-headed Cowbird. Also, the bird in question appeared to be larger and darker than most female Brown-headed Cowbirds.

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Ted Floyd, 01:30 PM 5/3/1998, OOPS!

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Return-Path: <ted@dept.english.upenn.edu>  
Delivered-To: pabirds@redrose.net  
Date: Sun, 3 May 1998 13:30:47 -0400 (EDT)  
From: Ted Floyd <ted@dept.english.upenn.edu>  
Subject: OOPS!  
To: Frank & Barb Haas <pabirds@redrose.net>

I made a rather egregious typo in the first line of my report for the P.O.R.C. It should say "Brewer's", not "Rusty". That's perhaps obvious (and I got the Latin name right, too), but I just wanted to clear it up.

Best, Ted

- > This is a description of a Rusty Blackbird  
!!!!!!
- > (Euphagus cyanocephalus) that I saw in
- > Philadelphia County PA on 17 April 1998.
  
- > It was fairly late in the afternoon (about

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation - Round One**

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

Date of Sighting: 17 April 1998 to 17 April 1998

Location: JOHN HEINZ NWR AT TINICUM

County: PHILADELPHIA

Observer(s): Ted Floyd

Date of Submission: 1998

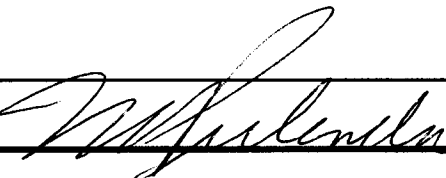
Submitted by: Ted Floyd

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

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					<del>FF</del>
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			6					1 <del>2</del>
DECISION			X					

Comments: 6/0/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

9/28/00