

861-02-1998

CBC NAME / DATE: **Reading, PA / 20 Dec.'98**

SPECIES (number/age/sex): **Brewer's Blackbird (one adult male)**

OBSERVER: Dean Kendall (the below account written by me, based on my fieldnotes)

OTHER OBSERVERS: None that i've learned of to date, tho several have gone looking.

DESCRIPTION: About the **size of a (smallish) Red-wing Blackbird, entirely black** (but see below) **save for whitish or pale yellowish eyes; tail of medium length**, with rounded corners and slight central notch (in length roughly like that of Red-wing; not elongate like that of Grackle); **head smallish yet prominent ('held high'), smoothly rounded**; dark **bill straight-edged, elongate-conical, projecting beyond the face roughly half the length of the head** (back to front) or a bit more; leg color not noted.

Plumage entirely black **without any grey or rusty**, but **with a definite sheen, more or less thruout** in most (but not all) views, of uncerain hue due to lack of direct sunlight; the 'hood' (head/upper breast) - defined by contrasting if indeterminate (+/-uniform) sheen-hue of the rest of the body - **at times appearing vaguely purplish** (particularly so at ~100 ft. while perched in tree, but also later on the ground at ~200 ft. when it turned head-on for a moment, such that the head was framed against the body/shoulders), **and never any other hue**; the hue of the rest of the body's sheen undetermined (altho the contrast with the at-times-purplish 'hood' was great enough to easily allow greenish to be read into it).

VOICE: A single "check" note, once, on taking flight.

BEHAVIOR & HABITAT: First sighted at ~200 ft away, quietly perched by itself ~20 ft. up in the outer branches of a smallish tree (in a brushy stretch of creek-bottom next to a little-trafficked road); appearing unfazed as I approached on foot in slow stages to within ~100 ft. After several minutes of its sitting there in one spot (perhaps 10 minutes from first sighting), it got briefly a bit antsy then took off (with a "check" - see above), flying across the road to the adjacent low slope of a bare cornstubble field, where it set about foraging corn amid a strung-out flock of some 190 Mourning Doves (with a lone Starling at the far end of the pack). It fed there alongside the mostly resting doves (one could see it chewing the corn into pieces) more or less actively for at least the 10 or so additional minutes I stayed to watch it (from within my vehicle, which i had used to reapproach the bird after it joined the doves).

The area is one of low fields and creekbottom pasture with some trees and brush, butting up to partly-farmed/partly-wooded hills that a bit downstream have a monster rock-quarry gouged into them. Less than 1/2 mile away on the other side of the creek and a little downstream (opposite the quarry) is a spot where poultry offal is spread, attracting the usual Black/Turkey Vultures, Red-tails and Starlings/Blackbirds, the latter on Count Day numbering some 600, mostly Starlings but with a couple dozen each of Cowbirds and Red-wings (as best could be seen; the ground's contours there hide much of the site from view).

(That the bird was found by itself in the vicinity of creekbottom could be taken as weighting the scales toward Rusty, but that it joined a flock of Doves feeding in an open field could be taken as equal weight toward Brewer's. And probably neither means much.)

861- -1998

CONDITIONS OF OBSERVATION: Early afternoon, sky fully overcast (light diffuse, moderately bright; no direct sunlight); air mild, still. Perched bird viewed from as near as ~100 ft. using 20x wide-angle, stock-mounted Bushnell scope, braced to the knee/s (also 7x binos); view of bird on ground in cornstubble field at ~200 ft. thru same 20x scope, braced thru windowframe of vehicle.

LOCATION: In Oley Twp. (Berks Co.) along the east side of Monocacy Creek, on Quarry Rd. just upstream (north) of its intersection with Bieber Mill Rd., at the point where it crosses a small creeklet flowing in from a wooded hollow to the east.

SIMILAR SPECIES / COMMENTS: It's been half a dozen years since I last saw a Brewer's Blackbird, but prior to that I'd spent a couple decades living among them, particularly in San Francisco, CA, where the bird is very common (including gleaning under foot with the pigeons). The instant I got my scope on the bird, still 200' off, I thought: Brewer's! ... it can't be! Yet there was that familiar distinctive profile, and further study only made it plain that it could be nothing else. Despite less than optimal light which reduced the iridescence to mostly colorless sheen.

Rusty Blackbird, being similar in appearance and the more likely species by range, has of course to be ruled out. Unfortunately I'm much less familiar with the Rusty (altho over the years I've crossed paths with more than a handful - and none has ever suggested itself as Brewer's). I do, however, have detailed notes of close observations I made of a single adult male Rusty Blackbird which some years ago visited our feeders for a spell (eating corn from the ground, just like this Brewer's) around this same time of year (22 Dec. - 9 Jan, '91/'92). From those notes, verbatim (save for spelling out abbr.s): "22 Dec., Rusty Blackbird ... +/- breeding plumage male: head/('hood')/breast bronze (slight green cast in some lights); back/wings iridescent blue/(purple)-black; flanks/belly/undertail-coverts seem dull +/- black (thought i might've made out a sparse few, narrow rusty feather edges on flanks, but at least most of the time no such visible); big bill (if you count the base, it's about as long as the head; bill & legs dark/black; eye yellow; tends to flick his tail (up) a good bit [emphases in the original]." This 'by the texts, atypical' plumage might at first glance seem to discount iridescence altogether as a diagnostic field mark, but note that the underside (below the 'hood') is dull black/without sheen; whereas the Brewer's underside (at least down to the undertail-coverts) had a definite sheen. Especially note and contrast my description of this Rusty's bill length with that of the Brewer's, above (altho the difference is something less than the 'double' which a comparison of the descriptions may seem to invite, since the observed bill-length of the Brewer's, as reported above, doesn't include the part not projecting beyond the face - because by time I thought to make a precise comparative note for the records, the bird at 200' was too distant to see that black-on-black part).

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 20 December 1998 to 20 December 1998

Location: READING

County: BERKS

Observer(s): Dean Kendall

Date of Submission: 1998

Submitted by: Dean Kendall

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				X
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			5	1				1/2
DECISION			X					

Comments: 5/1/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

9/28/00