

861-02-1999

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD

Species: Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), 2 individuals – both male

Observer: Scott F. Bastian [+Jill Bastian, briefly]

Location: Farm of Lowell/Carna Friedline (my in-laws) near Gray, PA {off of Rt. 985 in NW Somerset County}

Date/Time: April 4, 1999 @ 3:00 PM

Duration of Observation: 15-20 minutes total; birds left the area

Range of Observation: 15 –50 yards

Optics: B&L 10x40 Customs binocular, Bushnell Spacemaster Scope 60 mm with zoom lens 15-45x

Weather: raining and dark at start – progressively less rain & lighter, always complete cloud cover

Prior experience with the species: numerous w/ Rusty Blackbird, have observed Brewer's Blackbird in California {'90}, Wisconsin {'90 & '91}, and Nevada {'96}

Story: I was inside & observing a stream of Robins pass through my Mother-in-law's yard when two completely dark blackbirds hopped up over an embankment. They were immediately identifiable as either Rusty or Brewer's Blackbirds and appeared glossy overall. No iridescence was noted in the poor light. I went outside in the rain for a better look and the birds flushed to a nearby small tree. I went inside to get my scope and came back out to see the birds fly to an open field. I observed them there for most of the time; mostly just one of the two but sometimes both together. They moved around in the field a bit and were joined periodically by a loose flock of Red-wings, Starlings, Grackles, and Cowbirds. The latter half of the observation time was very light drizzle and ~ five minutes of no precipitation. As the weather improved, the birds lifted and flew out of sight to the North.

Features;

Size: Slightly smaller than a Robin

Bill: all dark; not as broad at the base as some photos of Brewer's portray, but broader than a typical Rusty and more consistent with Brewer's; light/small 'whitish' spot at the base of one bird's bill

Head: As in body . . . occasionally showed faint purple iridescence with some views – greenish in others, or just glossy [poor light]; no head-body demarcation noted in the iridescence

Eye: white

Body: all dark/glossy; occasional iridescence was at times 'metallic' green and at times purple/green

Feet/Legs: dark

Vocalization: When the birds flew off, one uttered several times what sounded like "Weck – la" to me. Accent on the 'weck' with the second syllable being less pronounced and faint.

Other:

In the interest of completeness, I observed very briefly what might have been a female Brewer's. This individual joined a male in the field of view and then rather abruptly after I locked on to her, she flew off. I noted only a dark eye and did not have time to mentally note all other field marks. I searched to relocate but could not find that bird again. Therefore it is of no real use.

From personal observations, I've come to think of Brewer's as having a higher tolerance for human presence – Rusties seem more nervous about approach by people. Also, Brewer's strike me as being more "refined" or sleek vs. a Rusty. These birds matched those jizz criteria for a Brewer's.

By the time I went to get another viewer (my wife), the rain had stopped. But she had only distant, brief views – inadequate to truly support my observations.

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Key ID points;

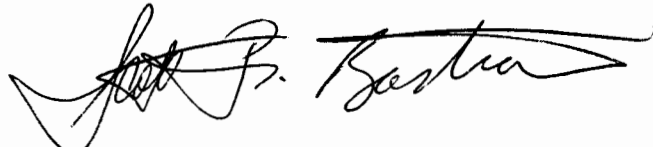
- glossy plumage vs. more typical flat black for Rusty
- purple iridescence – as far as I am aware, Rusties don't show purple on the head, but sometimes green
- when visible, green iridescence of body was of 'metallic' sort as opposed to 'moss' green sheen that is sometimes noted on body/head of Rusty Blackbird
- white eye (as opposed to faint yellow tint in Rusty)
- broad-based bill (thinner in Rusty)
- while both species may forage in fields, Brewer's is more likely to do so

My own criticisms:

In the absence of females and in the spring, Rusties and Brewer's are rather difficult to separate. My own estimation is that at least some of the reports of this species for PA are in error. My observation coincides with a time when Rusties would be near their peak movement through PA. The vocalization that I heard does not (in my opinion) rule-in or rule-out either species. Eye color is somewhat subjective and should not be relied upon to separate the two species.

That being said, I feel that the carefully observed points were all consistent enough to call these Blackbirds "Brewer's."

Duly submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott F. Bastian". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Scott F. Bastian

5/99

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 4 April 1999 to 4 April 1999

Location: GRAY

County: SOMERSET

Observer(s): Scott Bastian

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Scott Bastian

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Recording: No			Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess			X					
R. Ickes			X					
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			6	1				
DECISION			X					

Comments: 6/1

Signature (Secretary): *W. J. ...*

Date: 2/27/01