



Male Painted Bunting, 22 April 1993, Jackson County. Photo by Dennis Oehmke.

Painted Bunting: First Confirmed State Record

by Ben Gelman

As Southern Illinois Audubon Society's birding hotline contact person, I was not surprised to get a phone call 21 April 1993 from Ann Minckler, an avid bird feeder who lives about a mile from me in Makanda Township, Jackson County.

"I've had a couple of unusual birds at one of our backyard feeders since yesterday," she said. "I wonder if you could come over and take a look at them."

"Can you give me a clue?" I asked. It's often possible for me to make an identification by phone, but that was not to be the case this time.

"Well, one of them is a Blue Grosbeak and I'm pretty sure the other one is a Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)."

The Blue Grosbeak is a regular, if uncommon, summer resident in

southern Illinois. But a Painted Bunting? I was skeptical. The south to southwestern species has been

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known to visit feeding stations for sunflower seeds in southern U.S. backyards (Terres 1991). The species normally occurs as close to Illinois as Tennessee and southern Mis-

souri. But no confirmed sightings had been made in Illinois (Bohlen 1989).

Several reports that have been made for the prairie state were either one-observer sightings or lacked sufficient details. One report was from a roadside in Wabash County (1889), one from Decatur (1963), one from a feeder in Chicago (1967), and one from Urbana (1967).

Confirmation of Minckler's sighting would make the Painted Bunting an official state first. Obviously, I was compelled to visit her back yard for confirmation.

I arrived at 5 p.m. It was about 65 degrees and plenty of light was still available for accurate observation. I parked my car to face the back of the house where several feeders were hanging. Minckler's yard consists of