

Male Painted Bunting Visits Bloomington Normal: Third State Record



*Painted Bunting, 20 May 1999. Bloomington, IL, McLean County.
Photo by Joe B. Milosevich.*

by Alexandra "Sacha" Latham,
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and Michael Retter

We (Sacha and Sheryl) had been planning to go birding for some time, but Sacha's busy college schedule left few blocks of time for our trip. We finally conceded we would have to plan an afternoon trip to a local park, and we accepted the fact that our mid-day start might decrease the diversity of birds we would view. We headed to Ewing Park in Bloomington, right after lunch on Wednesday 19 May 1999.

It was a beautiful afternoon, with temperatures in the mid-70s, light winds, and partly cloudy conditions.

As it turned out, it was a much better day for birding than we could have ever anticipated. We viewed a nice sampling of the usual suite of May migrants through McLean County, and we were both quite content with our accomplishments as we began to wind down for the afternoon. As we walked along the bark-covered path just west of the "Hedge Apple Woods" area of the park, we knew it was time to head back to campus. As we scanned the

grassy patches and shrubby hedgerow along the path, Sacha spotted a bright bird that caught her attention. We were quite a distance away from the bird, but we saw a red chest and contrasting darker wings that reminded us of a tanager. However, Sacha knew right away that this was not the correct diagnosis. We both pointed our binoculars toward the bird and realized we were in the presence of an adult male Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) in full breeding plumage.

The blue head and yellowish-green upper back clinched the identification. The bird's red eye ring was strikingly visible. The bunting was initially perched in a patch of short grasses and shrubs, but it then made a short flight to the bark-covered path and paraded around before us on the path for approximately five minutes. It remained silent, but we certainly did not need a vocal confirmation of this identification.

As we headed to the car, we excitedly talked about our find. We knew this was a very special bird to see in

Illinois, because the checklist we carried that day failed to even mention the Painted Bunting. However, only when we returned to the campus of Illinois Wesleyan University and e-mailed Michael Retter did we begin to fully appreciate the significance of our find. It turns out that in 1993, Ann Minckler found the first confirmed Illinois record of this species at her feeder; this male bird in breeding plumage remained in Jackson County from 20-22 May (Gelman 1994). In addition, an immature male Painted Bunting was killed by flying into a window at McCormick Place in Chicago and was discovered by Willard and Stotz on 10 October 1996 (Willard and Stotz 1997). This first Illinois specimen record of the species now resides at the Field Museum. In other words, our sighting represents only the third confirmed sighting of the species in Illinois, and only the second live sighting.

Needless to say, Michael was very excited by our news, and he went later that day to view the bird. He made myriad phone calls and the locals, Dale Birkenholz, Todd Bugg, and Ed Mockford, all joined him. The first hour of searching was fruitless, but Dale finally refound the bird on the mulched path when it came to feed. The bird proved to be rather difficult to observe over the next three days, disappointing a few, but entertaining many. It tended to stay

Meadowlark