

downstate the previous weekend stood in the spot where Swainson's Warblers once nested in southern Illinois, without seeing the bird. This state-endangered species may be extirpated as part of the breeding avifauna in Illinois. It can be recognized by its long spiky bill, conspicuous pale eyebrow beneath a brown crown, dark eye-line, and brownish olive back, with light underparts.

Black-headed Grosbeak

Bob and Karen Fisher were birding on their 3.5-acre property in Downers Grove in Cook County on 10 May, cataloging the tremendous fallout of birds lingering from the day before. While watching a Northern Parula Warbler feeding in a maple tree, Bob saw a larger bird, which had a beak the size and shape of a grosbeak. With the bird facing him in bright sunlight, its black head and russet/orange breast, which paled to yellow on the belly, were very clear. The bird had no streaking as might be expected in a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Phyeucticus ludovicianus*), so Bob determined it to be a Black-headed Grosbeak (*P. melanocephalus*), a rare vagrant in the state (Bohlen 1989). After 30 seconds, the bird flew straight west out of sight, not to be relocated by Bob's disappointed wife. The Fishers watched for days as more than 20 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks visited their feeders without their western cousin. This sighting is the tenth Illinois state record (Bohlen 1989). Most have been seen in winter.

Lazuli Bunting

A Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*) was seen in the spring of 1996, Illinois' second record and first spring sighting (Bohlen 1989). David Bohlen observed one individual in Springfield 7 May. A male Lazuli Bunting can be separated from a male

Indigo Bunting (*P. cyanea*) by its cinnamon sides and white wingbars. Separating females is more difficult, and a possible second occurrence of this species the spring of 1996, a female bird, was not accepted by the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee.



Green-tailed Towhee, Boone Co. 21 May 1996.
Photo by Dan Williams.

Green-tailed Towhee

Another enviable backyard bird was seen by Arlene Brei in Poplar Grove in Boone County 21 May. Brei looked through the pouring rain at a drenched bird in her yard and had no idea what she was seeing. She thought of hybrids, a weird kind of thrush, a sparrow, perhaps. Calls to her friend, Gene Simrl, president of a Beloit, Wisconsin birding club, and the nearby Syberson Nature Center also proved fruitless. On 22 May, Brei awoke at 7:15 a.m. to a strange song she had never heard before. The bird was finally in clear light, and dry. Brei checked all the references again and stopped dead at a picture of a Green-tailed Towhee (*Pipilo chlorus*) in her father's 1923 edition of Chester Reed's "Land Birds East of the Rockies." Peterson's "Eastern Birds" showed a head shot of this western towhee and Brei knew she had the bird's identity. When she called Syberson Nature Center back to hesitantly offer her identification, the naturalists there excitedly told her

that some Rockford birders they had talked to said: "She's describing a Green-tailed Towhee." People began arriving at her house and watched the bird through an open window on 22 May. The bird was too skittish for outdoor viewing. Photos were taken, one by American Birding Association's President Dan Williams, an IOS member from Rockford. Coffee was drunk and the 14 lucky birders thanked their lucky stars for Illinois' eighth record of a Green-tailed Towhee. Three previous records were from spring, four were from winter. (Bohlen 1989). The bird was gone when Brei woke up the next day.

The Green-tailed Towhee is a rusty-capped western sparrow with green back and tail, black malar stripe, and white throat. It is normally associated with dense shrubs, dense montane chaparral, on dry slopes, in higher valleys and foothills (Rising 1996). This bird is casual or accidental north to British Columbia and east to Nova Scotia, Massachusetts, New York, Georgia, Louisiana, Florida, and other eastern states (Rising 1996).

Literature Cited

- American Birds, National Audubon Society, New York, NY. 1990 - 1995.
- Bohlen, H.D. 1989. The Birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, IN.
- Mlodinow, S. 1984. Chicago Area Birds. Chicago Review Press. Chicago, IL.
- Rising, J.D. 1996. The Sparrows of the United States and Canada. Academic Press. Toronto, Canada.
- Robinson, W.D. 1996. Southern Illinois Birds. Southern Illinois University Press. Carbondale, IL.

—Christine Williamson
4016 N. Clarendon Ave., #3N
Chicago, IL 60613

Meadowlark