



*Bicknell's Thrush drawing by Brian K. Willis.*

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I thought if I could just see one for myself, I could compare "my bird" to a definite Bicknell's and come to a more solid conclusion.

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to the thrush section only to find the plate that included Bicknell's displayed all the thrushes as excessively blandly colored. The Bicknell's Thrush was depicted with a tepidly warm tail. My bird's tail was a strong chestnut, like that shown by the color plate accompanying Ouellet's (1993) paper. My verbal communication with Ouellet indicated chestnut was the correct color for Bicknell's, but his passing before publication of the new geographic guide precluded any discussion of this discrepancy. Another reference states the chestnut in the tail of Bicknell's Thrush can be variable, and that some Gray-cheeked Thrushes may also appear to have warm brown or even chestnut-colored tails, although they don't abruptly clash with the back color (McLaren 1995).

The final obstacle to justifying the addition of this bird to my life and Lake County lists is that I did not note other Bicknell's characteristics, nor did I hear it sing. This problem bird flew off before I had time to check for other clues to its identity. If it

indeed were a Bicknell's, the proximal half of its lower mandible should have been a bright pale yellow and its throat should have been buffy (Ouellet 1993). Without these additional features, it is impossible to feel comfortable "claiming" such a rare and out-of-range bird by only a few key characteristics. And without hearing this bird sing, it may have been impossible to determine its identity even if I had recorded more detailed plumage observations.

So, after almost one year's worth of work attempting to conclusively determine what this bird was, I am afraid I must stay where I am, two Lake County birds behind Al, singing the Bicknell Blues.

#### **Literature Cited**

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Editor's Note: See guest essay for comments on birds difficult to identify in the field.