

A Violet-green Swallow Visits Northeastern Illinois

by Eric Walters



Violet-green Swallow drawing by Walter Marcisz.

The morning of July 18, 1991 I was observing early fall swallow migrants at the south end of Gillson Park in Wilmette. I noticed an unusual swallow perched on a telephone wire 15 feet away from me. The bird was completely white on the side of its face, indicating this was not a Tree Swallow.

I noted the white extending up over the back part of its eye, the forest green back, and the bright, olive-green crown. The bird sported immaculate white underparts down to a slightly notched tail.

Five minutes later, a fisherman flushed the bird, allowing me to see two large white rump spots separated by a dark line. The bird's flight and calls were noticeably different than the other four nearby swallow species.

By then, I knew it was an adult Violet-green Swallow.

This swallow species is considered a rare vagrant to areas east of the Mississippi River.

The only Illinois record of this bird was a specimen taken from the Lake Calumet region some 94 years ago (Bohlen, 1989).*

Why would this bird with so few records in the east appear in the middle of the summer along the lake front? This species breeds as close as the southwestern Dakotas and western Nebraska. Perhaps after breeding, an errant individual wandered eastward to the Chicago area. It's more likely, though, that this bird was a fall migrant that was pushed to the edge of Lake Michigan by a strong southeasterly moving cold front which happened two days prior to my sighting.

Bank, Northern Rough-winged, Tree, Cliff, and Barn Swallows plus Purple Martins begin their fall movement through the Chicago area often in early July. Migration peaks for a few of these species in early August. The Violet-green

Swallow also begins its fall migration by July (Bent, 1942). Perhaps the Violet-green joined a group of other migrating swallow species. ■

LITERATURE CITED

Bent, A.C. 1942. *Life Histories of North American Birds*. Smithsonian Institution Press. Washington D.C.

Bohlen, H.D. 1989. *The Birds of Illinois*.

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* The Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IIRC) has removed Violet-green Swallow from the Illinois state checklist since the specimen is no longer extant. This current sighting is under review by IIRC.