



Say's Phoebe at Fermilab, DuPage County, 28 November 1998. Photos by Pete Moxon.

Phoebe (*Says sayornis*) I had never seen one before. For the next 40 minutes or so the bird displayed in classic phoebe style: tail pumping, flitting from the fence to the ground; fluttering down the fence line, and perching on a nearby buildings and the earth berm north of the buildings.

We notified the DuPage and Chicago rare bird alerts or hotlines and called Bob and Karen Fisher to get the word out quickly to birders. We continued to watch and record written plumage detail such as the gray-brown back; black tail above and below; head darker than back; throat and breast grayish; dull orange belly; dark eyes and single thin white wing bars—on the spot as we observed key field marks and other details such as the constant wagging of the bird's tail as well as the pumping of its tail whenever it landed; these original notes and photos are on file with the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee.

The next morning I was privileged to show nearly 20 people the Say's Phoebe although it was not always easy to find in the winds. What made the whole experience so enjoyable and fulfilling is that we got to share this rare phoebe discovery with others. That was the last day the phoebe was seen.

— Pete Moxon

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— Vince Moxon

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DuPage County's First Vermilion Flycatcher

The path on the west side of McKee Marsh, Winfield, Illinois, meanders through an oak savanna and opens into a small grassy field. Bluebird houses are in the field and adjacent to the marsh. A new elevated platform

overlooks the marsh. It is a splendid place to view birds. Here the interface of marsh, swamp, edge woods, and grasses mingle. A large dead poplar once sat in the marsh near this point, a sentinel that had a history of birds that have graced its branches through the years. An Osprey, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, herons, cormorants, and an Anhinga have left their mark on this grand old tree, now only a stump. Perhaps the ghost of this tree attracted the special bird this day, 7 October 1998.

My wife Joanne and I take hikes almost daily, now that I am retired. Chasing rare species used to be a passion. Today I just enjoy rambles through the woods and fields, accepting nature's bounty, whatever may be served up. Characteristically, Joanne, prefers to travel without binoculars. She sees things better than I do, even though I sport 10 x 42s.

On this day, we strolled through the woods and grassy fields without any expectations. As we approached the new raised wooden platform overlooking the marsh, my wife appeared to be studying something perched on one of the bluebird houses. She said it looked like a tiny pumpkin. The skeptic that I am—I wanted to say, "yeah sure, a pumpkin sitting on a bluebird house." From past experience, I knew that I had better investigate whatever Jo had been watching.

I focus my binoculars on the bluebird house in question. A small bird is perched on the house, not blue, not a pumpkin—but a small vibrant red and dark brownish bird. I'm sure that most birders when confronted with a rarity when not expected, must search his/her mind for an identification. Fortunately I had many experiences with this bird—a Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*).

We spent 20 minutes observing the bird perched and flycatching. My instincts told me that this bird was rare for this area; only once had I seen a Vermilion Flycatcher East of the Mississippi. Years ago one showed up on the Chicago River. At that time I took several pictures of it. Today I just wanted to share this bird with others. I immediately went home and called Jim Frazier to spread the word. Fortunately the bird remained in the area for the rest of the day and one more day to boot. Several birders did see the bird before it departed the area or perhaps it was consumed by one of the many raptors that frequent the marsh edges. Now when we take our hikes, I listen to my wife carefully. Pumpkins, pixies, elves, it doesn't matter. I look when she beckons.

— Hal Cohen

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