

A Remarkable First Illinois Record: Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*)

by Pam Sprout

Bold, fearless, different—the Intrepid. Intrepid was the name my husband, Barry, and I jokingly gave the mystery bird that arrived on our suet cake feeders in mid-January 2000.

The bird first appeared mid-morning 15 January. We have five general feeders, three finch feeders, and four suet feeders in front of our home. Our suet cakes are homemade. Our home in Toulon, Illinois in Stark County, faces east on a quiet north-south one-block street. We watch the birds often from a large picture window in the dining room; the binoculars are always close by.

At first, we mistook the bird for a starling because of its size; Barry started to open the front door to scare it away, since starlings are not necessarily popular with the other birds or us. However, he noticed the olive-yellow coloring on the underside. I grabbed the binoculars to get a closer look, then made notes of all its physical features.

Plumage

The bird was about 8 inches in length. The entire underside including the basal half of the tail was yellow with an olive tinge. This coloration was also on the lower back under the wings. The tail was dark olive-brown with a slight notch. The bird's head, upper back, and throat were olive-brown with darker olive-brown streaks or mottling matching the tail's color. A black spot was beginning to appear on the throat. Dark olive-brown wings sported two white wing bars. A noticeable character was the straight, long black bill. Later observation

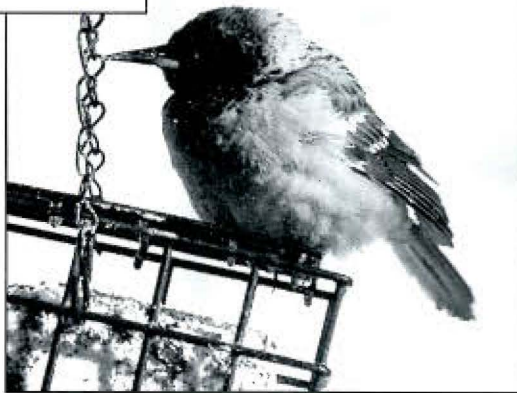


Juvenile male Scott's Oriole at backyard feeder. First accepted state record. Photo taken sometime between mid-January and 3 February 2000. Toulon, Illinois. Stark County. Note the overall yellowish plumage (seen in the color photo), long, slightly decurved bill, and fine streaking on the back. Photos by Pam Sprout.

showed white on the edges of both upper and lower mandibles, as well as a few white feathers at the base of the bill on both sides. The iris appeared dark brown or black. Under certain light conditions, I observed a dark eye mask, which didn't appear on photos, but could be seen on the video. The legs and feet were also black.

Discovery and identification

The bird's initial visit occurred when the mid-January temperature was about 46 degrees F a low of around 27 degrees F. During that brief mid-morning visit, he ate at the suet feeder 6 feet in front of the house, then left for the day. The next day the temperatures were 32 degrees for a high and 22 degrees for the low. However, on this day our mystery friend returned to the suet cake in mid-afternoon. He stayed longer than the day before. Again, we looked through our



bird guides with more scrutiny attempting to identify him. No luck in finding a bird with his markings.

It seemed the bird was alternating his feeding times between mornings and afternoons. He then started coming during the morning and returning in the afternoon, staying for longer periods each time. On 19 January, Mother Nature pulled a cruel trick on our mystery bird by dipping the temperatures from 27 degrees to 1 degree and dumping 6.5 inches of snow.

By this time, Barry and I realized the bird was going to be a daily customer. The more he came and ate, the more frustrated we became. Again,