

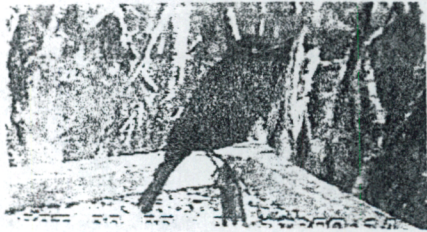
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Wading Birds of the World. E. Soothill; R. Soothill. 1982.
The Birds of Canada. Revised Edition. W.E. Godfrey. 1986.
Birds of Eastern and Central North America. 5th Edition. 2002.
Lives of North American Birds. K. Kaufman. 1996.
Birds of Ontario. J. Hughes. 2001

Editor's Note: The documentation of rare wildlife, especially those that are difficult to identify, is one of the goals of the Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island. David's detailed observation records on this sighting form an important part of our historic record system for such rare wildlife. Please note the various headings which identify the various pieces of information which are useful, especially for harder to identify species. You will find a list of the elements in the Field Checklist of Birds of Prince Edward Island. Field guides provide illustrations of the various body parts described above and are useful in helping you to describe various characteristics to confirm identifications.

Prince Edward Island Brewer's Blackbird Sighting:

by Dwaine Oakley

On October 21st and 22nd of 2002, I noticed an interesting Icterid in one of the tray feeders in my backyard in Stratford, Prince Edward Island about 8 km east of Charlottetown. Judging by the size it was smaller than a Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula* but similar in size to a Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*. In many respects it resembled a miniature grackle. At first I passed it off as a Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus* because it is the species which is known to frequent and nest on P.E.I. During the two sunny days that the bird came to the feeders, I was able to study it from approximately 7 m through my 12X25 Bausch & Lomb binoculars and obtain approximately twenty minutes of video footage of a couple of the visits the bird made. The video was taken with a JVC Camcorder model GR-AXM225 set at 16X optical zoom power. This video would later lead to help identify the blackbird as being the Island's first documented record of a Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*.



It was not until several days later and after the blackbird departed on October 31st, 2002 that I began to question my identification of Rusty Blackbird. While reading posts on NatureNS, I seen a message which mentioned a possible Brewer's visiting someone's feeder in Nova Scotia. After checking several field guides, notably Sibley's and National Geographic and comparing them to the bird on the video, I realized the blackbird matched the description of a fall variant or 1st year fall male Brewer's.

The bird had a strong purplish/blue to almost black iridescence over most of the body when it was perched in bright sunlight conditions. This iridescence was similar in appearance to a Common Grackle which at one point landed nearby the mystery blackbird in the video. The heavy gloss was mostly on the wings, back and tail. There was no rusty edging on the tertials, wing coverts or any other parts on the bird. Instead there was a light tan/gray fringing which was mostly confined to the head, nape and throat areas. The bill, which is only considered a supporting feature in separating Brewer's and Rusty Blackbirds, looked shorter and fatter to long and tapered depending on the angle from which the bird was viewed. Another noticeable feature was the long legged appearance the bird had when perched on the tray feeder. It resembled a small grackle when feeding. The tail was strongly notched due to missing central tail feathers and this made the tail look shorter than it actually would have been if all the feathers were there. Thus this feature was not as much help as it could have been in identifying the bird. During the two days that the blackbird came to the feeders, I never heard any vocalizations come from the bird.

To help confirm the tentative identification of the bird as a Brewer's Blackbird, copies of the video as well as still images created electronically from the video were sent to more experienced birders in both Canada and the United States. In December of 2002, I showed the video to Vernon Laux from Massachusetts and Brian Dalzell of