

Species: RUSTY BLACKBIRD
Record No. 509-77-01

Location: BASKETT SLOUGH NWR, POLK CO
Date(s): NOV. 13, 1977

Observers	details	slides	prints	tapes
<u>ALAN CONTRERAS</u>	<u>A</u>			

Specimen no. & location _____

Accepted 10-0 _____
verified _____
Single rept. sighting _____
Multiple rept. sighting _____

Not accepted _____
origin questionable _____
exotic not estab. _____

Records split _____ Records combined _____

Disposition

Secretary's File _____ Duplicate File _____
Main File A _____ details A _____
Slide File _____ slides _____
Print File _____ prints _____
Tape File _____ tapes _____

Date observer(s) notified: _____

Details:

Rusty Blackbird

1979-71
1509-77-01A

Alan Contreras

While visiting Baskett Slough NWR in Polk County on November 13, 1977, I located a male Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) in a flock of about 800 Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds feeding in a freshly turned field. The flock was feeding on both sides of Perrydale Road about two kilometers north of Smithfield Road, just outside refuge boundaries. I first saw the bird at 12:45 P.M., as we had stopped the car to look at an odd bird (not the Rusty). I got out, looked out at the flock for a moment, then noticed a highly-colored blackbird nearby, about 20m away. A quick look using 8 X 40 binoculars showed a bird matching what I recalled were the field marks of a Rusty Blackbird. I then pointed the bird out to Kathy Finnell, who watched it while I got out a book to compare it with. The bird flew out into the field at this point, and took several minutes to re-locate, as the blackbirds were crossing the road in large groups. By this time other observers had arrived, and a forest of scope tripods suddenly grew on the low hummock overlooking the field. The bird was re-located soon, and eight observers had a chance to observe it through 20X and 32X scopes at a distance of perhaps 50m in fairly good light, it was a mostly overcast but fairly bright day. Light on the bird was good, and the length of time observed varied from one observer to another (there were not quite enough scopes to go around). I watched it for about a minute. As other observers arrived, most of the blackbirds flew over a small rise to a section of the field not visible from the road, and to my knowledge the Rusty Blackbird has not been seen again. No photographs were obtained, and as far as I know none of the observers were familiar with the species in winter plumage, but all of us are familiar with plumages of Brewer's, Red-winged, Yellow-headed, Cowbird and some of us with Tricolored. No separable vocalizations could be sorted from the clatter of many blackbirds. This description was written Nov. 20, from many notes taken a few minutes after the bird went out of sight.

The bird was about the same size as the other blackbirds present, and at a distance the head and upper breast seemed very pale. Close examination showed those parts to be a very pale tan, nearly off-white, and noticeably barred throughout, with the exception of the nape, the cap and the area about the eyes. A narrow black band ran from the base of the bill through the eye, which was yellow, and the lores, ending rather abruptly. This feature helped set off the wide and very prominent superciliary line, which ran almost to the nape. The cap was a fairly bright rusty-brown, fairly similar in hue to that of a Green-tailed Towhee, though not quite so bright. The back was the same color, very sharply defined by the wings and upper rump and easily visible at a great distance when the bird turned away. The nape was duller than the cap and back, not the same color as indicated in illustrations I have seen. The rump, tail, belly and wings were an unrelieved dull black, except for two narrow but very visible rusty wing bars, seen only the first time at close range. No rusty edgings to other wing feathers were noted, at least by me, partly because I didn't think to look for them.

The pale barred breast area did not extend as far down toward the belly as indicated in Peterson (Western), Robbins or Pough, but rather was more similar to Crosby's illustration of a first-autumn male in Godfrey's Birds of Canada, though it showed more of the barred/scaled look than Crosby indicates.

Easily compared to all the other blackbirds present, from which it stood out obviously by its colors, if for no other reason; I am confident that it was a Rusty Blackbird, the only other record of which that I am aware of (which isn't saying much) is of a specimen taken at Tillamook by Alex Walker on March 20, 1959.

Also observing the bird and concurring in the identification were Kathy Finnell, Tad Finnell, Mark Egger, Elzy Eltzroth, Elsie Eltzroth, Kurt Rademaker and E.G. White-Swift.