

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER IN REGINA

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On the morning of 15 June 1987 at 6:30 am, there was an unfamiliar bird song amid the customary chorus of Robins, Yellow Warblers, and Clay-colored Sparrows outside the window.

It was a two-part buzz with a drop in pitch in the latter part and a tone or quality that immediately distinguished it from a Clay-colored Sparrow song. The singing continued at 15 to 30 second intervals, "zeeee-zuzz . . . zeeee-zuzz . . .," etc. Upon opening the front door and hearing

the song clearly, it occurred to me that I had heard this song somewhere on the Ontario Field Naturalists' record of eastern warblers. The singer was in an American Elm tree three houses along the street that runs perpendicular to Argyle Street.

From approximately 8 m through 7 x 50 binoculars a bright yellow head and underparts, a distinct black line through the eye, a greyish tail and wings, and two whitish wing bars could be seen. The overall posture and contour was that of a



BLUE-WINGED WARBLER ♂

wood warbler in full song. The bird was clearly a Blue-winged Warbler.

Realizing the importance of the sighting I awoke Karen, tried phoning two other Regina birders, then I took a tape recorder to try to record the song. A faint, but sufficiently recognizable example was recorded.

Bob Luterbach, Karen and I watched the warbler at a distance of 7 - 8 m for several minutes. Luterbach agreed with our identification of the bird. At 7:00 a.m. the bird was singing at greater intervals. When Tom Riffel arrived at 7:15 a.m., we had just lost sight of the warbler and it had apparently ceased singing. Twenty minutes of searching and listening in the surrounding area turned up nothing.

At approximately 7:35 a.m. a Peterson tape of a Blue-Winged Warbler was played near the spot where the bird was last seen. Though the call was weak, the bird responded immediately. It had moved two houses down into a back yard. There Tom, Bob and I had excellent views of the bird at distances of less than 3 m.

Bob and Tom last saw the Blue-winged Warbler at approximately 8:00 a.m. Subsequent searches by local birders on 15 and 16 June proved fruitless.

Viewing Conditions

This bird was seen under a clear sky in full sunlight, first with sun behind observers and then at the side. It was seen and heard over several minutes by four observers, two of whom (Luterbach, Riffel) have considerable field experience and complete familiarity with the warblers expected in Regina. All four observers saw it through binoculars at distances ranging from 2.5 to 9 m.

Other Records

The only confirmed record of a Blue-winged Warbler in Saskatchewan

occurred on 9 November 1965, when Frank Brazier found a dead male on the pavement of a Regina street.¹ Brazier's report noted two unpublished sightings of single Blue-winged Warblers at two separate locations near Regina on 19 and 20 May 1963.

As Brazier pointed out, the nearest breeding area for this warbler is hundreds of kilometres to the southeast at Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. According to the Regina office of Environment Canada, the unseasonably hot weather on 15 June 1987 (37° C) most likely resulted from a "south-easterly flow of warm air" on 13, 14, and 15 June. On 15 June the wind at ground level was south, southeast at 18 kmph. However, the wind speed at 1500 m was higher — perhaps 60 or 70 kmph.

Godfrey writes of the Blue-winged Warbler in Canada "Has wandered North to Wasaga Beach and Ottawa, Ontario . . . Breeds rarely in extreme Southern Ontario." And, on the strength of Brazier's specimen, he lists the Blue-Winged Warbler as "accidental" in Saskatchewan.²

Conclusion

The apparent northwestward drift of eastern passerines recently (Yellow-throated Vireos at Moose Mountain, Golden-winged Warblers at Duck Mountain, a Northern Parula in Regina, resident for two weeks) certainly prompts speculation on the significance of such an unusual visit in late spring. Was this a mere accident caused by a stiff southeast wind, or will there be more Blue-winged Warblers in the next few years?

¹ BRAZIER, F.H. 1966. Saskatchewan's first specimen of the Blue-winged Warbler. *Blue Jay* 24(1):9-10.

² GODFREY, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Mus. of Canada, Ottawa.