

FIELD NOTES

The Unexpected Bluebird

Marjorie Rines

October 27, 2000 was a funny day, heavily overcast but with a bad glare from the sun. I had sampled a couple of favorite places, but things were really slow, so I decided to drive to Concord for some fresh territory. I drove to the waste water treatment plant, a location with some terrific sparrow habitat. There are "no trespassing" signs marking the entrance, but I had received permission to bird the area before, and when I asked again, they were as hospitable as in the past.

As I walked toward a weedy dirt pile in the back, I noticed a small thrush-like silhouette perched high in a nearby tree. I often see bluebirds there, so I raised my binoculars, expecting to see a ruddy breast, but in the harsh glare, the breast looked gray. I circled the tree for a better view, and looked again. Blue back, gray belly. And the shape was off for Eastern Bluebird. I kept changing position, but the colors never changed. It was unequivocally a Mountain Bluebird.



Photograph by the author

I fired up the cell phone trying to reach people I knew worked nearby, but was only able to reach Wayne Petersen, who came right over (I was grateful for the sanity check). The bird stayed at the waste water plant through November 2, and I was able to see it several times in that time. In better light, its gray breast turned pale blue,

making most observers believe it was a male. It usually mixed with a flock of Eastern Bluebirds, and in flight was easily picked up by its leaner profile, and occasional kiting, kestrel-like behavior.

There are only four previous occurrences of Mountain Bluebird in Massachusetts. The first was an individual that landed on a ship offshore on April 28, 1980. Worcester county has had two records: one in Rutland on May 29, 1994, and another in New Braintree on April 13, 1997. A group of three individuals spent the winter in South Wellfleet in 1995. ↗