

A Sight Record of Townsend's Solitaire
in Newton County, Mississippi

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On 8 November 1985 at 0800, I observed an adult Townsend's Solitaire (Myadestes townsendi) for about five minutes in my parent's front yard on U.S. highway 80, 2.4 km east of Hickory, Newton Co., Mississippi. This is the first report of Townsend's Solitaire for Mississippi.

I first saw the solitaire as it flew, along with several Eastern Bluebirds (Sialia sialis), into a small overcup oak (Quercus lyrata). I did not have binoculars with me, and although the bird was only 10 m from me, I could see few field marks because it was backlit by the sun. Although it was the size of a Northern Mockingbird (Mimus polyglottos), several obvious characteristics caused me to realize it was not that species. The solitaire's general behavior was quite different from that of a mockingbird. As it perched, it displayed a certain "delicate airiness," reminiscent of an Eastern Bluebird, as it settled its wings. Its bill was smaller and daintier than that of a mockingbird, and the tail had a pronounced notch at the tip.

When I approached it, the solitaire flew into a nearby water oak (Quercus nigra). I then obtained binoculars (9 X 35) and was able to observe the bird in excellent light from about 5 m. I then immediately recognized the bird as a Townsend's Solitaire, a species I have observed many times in several western states.

Overall the bird was a uniform brownish-gray. It had a distinct whitish eye ring, but no other obvious head or facial features. The throat and belly areas were whitish-gray and slightly paler than the remainder of the body plumage. However, this color difference was not very pronounced. The wing and tail feathers were only slightly darker than the body plumage.

The solitary flew to several perches in the same oak. As it flew, I could see a thin white border along the entire length of each side of the tail and distinct orangish patches at the bases of the primaries and secondaries. The bill was small, dark gray, and similar in shape to that of an Eastern Bluebird. The feet were also dark gray. I did not hear the bird vocalize.

The Townsend's Solitaire flew from the water oak and disappeared into an eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) growing near a small grove of loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*). I did not see it again, and efforts by other birders later in the day were also unsuccessful.

The weather on the day of the observation was sunny and mild all day. There was no cloud cover, and winds were light and variable, mainly from the north.

The habitat in which the Townsend's Solitaire was seen was an open lawn with scattered trees and shrubs surrounding a house. The lawn was surrounded by essentially the same type of habitat: open pasture with scattered trees. The non-breeding habitat of Townsend's Solitaire is usually thought to be open woodland, pinyon-juniper association, chaparral, desert, or riparian woodland.

The Northern Mockingbird is probably the only North American species with which the Townsend's Solitaire could be confused. A Northern Mockingbird was present in the yard at the time the Townsend's Solitaire was seen, affording direct comparison.

Townsend's Solitaire is a bird of western North America (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). The eastern limit of its winter range is ordinarily western Missouri, western Oklahoma, and central Texas. However, records indicate that the species has occurred as far east as New York, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.

Literature Cited

- American Ornithologists' Union. 1983. Check-list of North American birds. 6th ed. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.