

## Acknowledgements

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# Photo Quiz

by  
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One thing that always drives me crazy about quiz shots is that they won't tell you what the bird is right away. You have to read through the entire account to "find the answer". To have people madly skimming through the "instructional" part of the quiz looking for the answer never struck me as particularly instructional! So here is the answer: it's a female **Brewer's Blackbird**.

Now why? Well, it is a blackbird. The bill is not conical enough for any sparrow or finch and the plumage is generally uniform. Due to the lack of gloss on any part of the plumage, and the fact that it is a June photograph, thereby ruling out a young bird, we can assume it's a female blackbird.

Some of our choices can be eliminated quickly. The bill is too fine and the tail is not long enough for a female grackle of any species.

The dark eye also helps rule out Great-tailed and Common Grackle. Yellow-headed Blackbird can also be ruled out by the uniformity of the plumage colour, particularly on the sides of the breast, and the lack of a small area of white near the base of the primaries. Brown-headed Cowbird is ruled out by the fine bill and longer tail alone. Red-winged Blackbird can also be eliminated by the lack of streaking on the under surface and the lack of an eyeline.

This leaves us with two choices: Rusty and Brewer's. The female Rusty can be eliminated by eye colour alone at this time of year. All Rusty Blackbirds should have pale yellow eyes in June whereas all female Brewer's should have dark eyes, as this bird does. Young Rusty Blackbirds have dark eyes in the first few weeks after fledging, but are also

well marked with buff and rusty crescents on much of their body feathering, unlike Brewer's.

While I don't see many Brewer's Blackbirds in Ontario, outside their normal areas of occurrence, one thing has always struck me that helps them stand out, and that is their flight style. Brewer's often seem to "float" when they fly. The wings appear more rounded, fuller, and longer than do the wings of Rusty Blackbirds. When Brewer's fly up off a roadside to a power line or fence, they appear very buoyant, almost as if they were not in complete control, while Rusty Blackbirds, like other blackbirds, are more purposeful in their flight style.

The legs of Brewer's also strike me as being longer, though this is not borne out by measurements, but I have found it to be a useful "impression" none-the-less.

Finally, photos can play tricks on you. This bird appears to have a very pale head. While there was a slight contrast noted in the field between the head and body colour, it was nowhere near as obvious as this photo makes it appear. This particular female was photographed at Churchill, Manitoba, where it is a rare vagrant.

Here is the next photograph to consider, a peep — truly a birder's dream!

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