

continued, with two more accepted records in 1975, *five* in 1976, and two in 1977. (This gives a total of 22 accepted British records through 1977.) Such an increase prompted the British Rarities Committee to write “. . . this beautiful small gull now seems bent on becoming an annual and increasingly widespread vagrant. It is no longer confined mainly to winter . . . and may appear in any month.” (O’Sullivan, 1977). Our 1978

occurrences give us hope that the same words can some day be said of Ross’ Gull in North America.

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RARE OCCURRENCE

Townsend’s Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) occurrence in Rhode Island

*The first verified New England record
and first for Rhode Island*

Richard Bowen

ON NOVEMBER 29, 1978, I conducted a bird census of a five-hundred acre area along the east shore of the Kicke-muit River in Warren, R.I., continuing a forty-year traditional late-November count of this tract. During the morning, the numbers of species and individuals were both running well below the average of past years, but at 12:30 p.m., a bird appeared in a mixed flock of chickadees, Carolina Wrens, Cardinals, and White-throated Sparrows that made this 1978 census a memorable one.

My initial reaction to the bird was that it might be a small, dark Mockingbird, but the one striking field mark that immediately alerted me to its being something different, was a pronounced white eye-ring. The bird was perched facing partially away from me, and the next field mark that was very obvious and very different from the Mockingbird, was a series of three white chevron markings on the back edge of the folded wing. The third point I noticed was a narrow, fairly long tail, that was distinctly notched.

After a minute or two of observation, the bird shifted position, presenting a side-on view and exposing a distinct light orange patch at mid-wing. At this point, I knew I was looking at a Townsend’s Solitaire. I then wrote down other field marks, most notably the catbird size, the medium gray underparts with little con-

trast between back and belly, the small dark bill, and least obvious of all, thin white outer tail feathers. When it flew, the orange wing patches became particularly prominent. The flight was quite distinctive, being rather slow and erratic. Each flight was of short duration as it moved alternately from the tops of deciduous trees to the lower branches of junipers.



Townsend’s Solitaire. Warren, R.I. November, 1978. Photo/Richard Bowen.

MY ORIGINAL OBSERVATION lasted about thirty minutes, and as I felt sure the species was a new record for the State of Rhode Island, I wasted no time getting camera equipment from my car. Relocating the bird quickly, I was able to get 30 pictures with a 600 mm Novoflex lens.

In the following days a large number of Northeastern region birders were successful in finding the solitaire. I have made 22 trips to the area since November 19, locating it on 20 of these. My last observation was February 4, 1979. The last date that anyone has seen it to my knowledge was February 11, in the middle of an extreme cold spell that the bird may not have survived.

The immediate area of this observation is an uninhabited hillside of mixed junipers and deciduous trees, with open spaces, leading down to a salt water river. It contains an abundance of berries, providing an ample food supply that has kept the bird reasonably confined to a small area of approximately five acres.

IN CHECKING PAST RECORDS, it appears that the Townsend’s Solitaire is a new bird for the State of Rhode Island, and appears to be the first record for New England that is verified by photographs or a specimen. A review of Northeastern records show the following (although this listing may not be complete):

- November 25, 1905, King’s Park, Long Island, N.Y. (collected)
- March 16, 1953, Amenia (Dutchess County), N.Y. (collected)
- December 3, 1957, West Gloucester, Mass. (sight record)
- October 25, 1975, Mary Pt., N.B. (sight record)
- December 29, 1975, Wolfville, N.S. (collected)
- October 20, 1976, Charlestown, N.H. (sight record)
- January 23, 1977, Sherbrook, Qué. (sight record)

The increasing number of records in recent years certainly would seem to indicate that the Townsend’s Solitaire is one of the Western stragglers that we should expect to see more of in years to come along the Northeastern coast.

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