

## Wooded Island Bird Walk Report for Saturday, October 1, 2011

Hello to All,

This was surely one of those events where, "you should have been there." Toward the end of our walk, as we crossed the soccer field area, I saw a couple of expert State birders that normally bird Montrose along the lakefront. We were told that our own Hyde Parker, Randy Shonkwiler, had reported a very rare vagrant, a GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE earlier this morning. This western bird was seen on what we call "Turtle Island," which is west of the golf shack and at the south end of Bobolink Meadow.

As we approached, we saw the happiest of sights: a birder on the bird. YES! This normally shy and smallest of North American Towhees, came out to see us. The bird perched for over a full minute on a metal fence stake, which was about 15 feet away and across the water. Then the bird flew to our side of the water and landed in some high shrubs. Later, it flew to the willow tree.

There were over a dozen birders with our group that had come STAT to chase the bird, with cameras and tapes in hand. More information on this extremely rare finding will be at the end of this report.

Most of the warblers were found in the Osaka Japanese Garden, which now has a new bilingual (English/Japanese) sign at its entrance gate. We spent a lot of time in the area west of the Rose Garden and found most of our non-warbler migrants in this area.

BIRDERS: 16. Sally, Hal, Joanne, Jennette, Jennie, Jean, Karin C., Leo, Caroline, Jerome, Liz, Betsy, Mark, Berthold, Markus, Pat

TIME: 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

PLACES: Wooded Island, Soccer Field with players, and Bobolink Meadow.

WEATHER: Mostly sunny. Windy with winds from the NNE 15 mph, Temperature in the 50's F.

TOTAL SPECIES COUNT: 41 (+2 other taxa)

Now for the birds:

Canada Goose - X.

Mallard – 12.

Double-crested Cormorant – 3.

Great Blue Heron – 4.

Cooper's Hawk – 1. Juvenile. Around the Rose Garden.

Buteo sp. 1. Fly over west of Rose Garden.

American Kestrel – 1. Wooded Island.

Ring-billed Gull – X.

Chimney Swift – 1. Reported by Jennie.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – 1. Wooded Island.

Belted Kingfisher – 1. Female. Music Bridge. Supplemental report by Eric G.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – 2. West of Rose Garden.

Hairy Woodpecker – 1. Female. In the large oak tree west of Rose Garden, discovered by Mark.

Northern Flicker – 12. In and west of the Rose Garden.

Eastern Phoebe – 1. Rose Garden.

American Crow – X.

Brown Creeper – 1. Wooded Island, north and east of Rose Garden.

Winter Wren – 2.

Golden-crowned Kinglet – 3.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – 6.

Swainson's Thrush – 1. Hiding from the Cooper's and frozen on a branch in shrubby northwest of Rose Garden fence line.

American Robin – 2.

Gray Catbird – 1

Brown Thrasher – 1. Wooded Island.

European Starling – 1.

Cedar Waxwing – 6. Heron Island.

Nashville Warbler – 1.

American Redstart – 1.

Magnolia Warbler – 1

Blackpoll Warbler – 1.

Palm Warbler – 2.

Yellow-rumped Warbler – 3.

Black-throated Green Warbler – 1.

Warbler sp. 1. Likely a PRAIRIE. Hal and Mark were fairly well convinced.  
Japanese Garden.

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE – 1.

Song Sparrow – 1.

White-throated Sparrow – 12

White-crowned Sparrow – 7+. A flock of 5 adults and 2 juveniles were in  
the NE corner of the Music Bridge.

Dark-eyed Junco – 1+. West of Darrow Bridge.

Northern Cardinal – 3.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak – 2. West of Rose Garden.

American Goldfinch – 8.

Here is some more information about the Green-tailed Towhee.

In "The Birds of Illinois" by H. David Bohlen, published 1989, the Green-tailed Towhee is said to be a "very rare vagrant." There are 7 records mentioned – 4 in winter and 3 in spring, and none in fall. The single Chicago record was from the Lincoln Park area on June 1, 1954

In "The Birder's Handbook" by Paul R. Ehrlich et al, the breeding habitat is in the high chaparral and shrublands with a few conifers about. The bird is found primarily in the mountains, and usually produces two broods. Several sources describe how the adult female behaviors if the nest is approached. She will drop straight down to the ground, wings closed and tail held high, and will run off in a chipmunk like imitation to presumably fool a predator to chase her.

From "Book of North American Birds", the Green-tailed Towhee is described as the smallest and most migratory of the towhees. They leave their nesting grounds entirely and head toward Mexico and the southwest USA. A few regularly wander off as far east as New England.

Paul C. "Birds of Jackson Park, Chicago" has never recorded a Green-tailed Towhee.

This is a really Big Find by Randy and he was generous to immediately alert the birding community. I don't know about you, but the next time I see Randy I am going to have him autograph my guide book beside the picture of the Green-tailed Towhee. Congratulations to Randy on this record find.

This report has been recorded on eBird.

As always, corrections, additions and comments are welcome.

The Wooded Island Walks are on Wednesday at 7 a.m. and on Saturday at 8 a.m. The group gathers on Darrow Bridge in Jackson Park, south of the Museum of Science & Industry.

Good Birding!

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