Curve-Billed Thrasher Wisconsin’s Second Record

By Don G. Follen Sr.

On Sunday December 21, 1986 Gary Hendrickson of Rural Spencer in Clark Co. called to tell me that he strongly suspected that he had a southwestern bird that had been staying in his yard. He also said he thought it to be a Curve-Billed Thrasher (Toxostoma curvirostre), a species which I had observed in S. California in 1969.

I drove into the yard and Gary was outside the door and waiting for me. Gary excitedly informed me that the bird was behind the house on the clothesline rack. Looking out a back bedroom window, sure enough, there it was. Immediately the orange-red eye became observable.

The bird was the general thrasher type, long, slim and when it flew it flew straight and close to the ground. The legs looked dark or deep green. The bill looked dark and the tail was charcoal black. The overall coloration of the bird dorsally was a dark olive charcoal. There was a white strip down the chin and throat but not as pronounced as in the bird books. The breast had a dark cloudy appearance with underlying spots or blotches but near uniform in size. The dark of the lower breast then blended into a clear, unspotted stomach area to the under tail coverts which when in the light had a cinnamon-rusty tinge to them. The bill appeared to be black and was about one and a half inches long and decurved along most of its length. The sides of the head appeared to be nearly the same shade as the back. Without any doubt we were observing Wisconsin’s second record of the Curved-Billed Thrasher (Toxostoma curvirostre), the first being in Buffalo Co. in July, 1971, see Passenger Pigeon 34:47-49, 35:37-38, at the Merton Maier’s. I then called Sam Robbins who was unable to come at the time and Ken and Jan Luepke who came along with their daughters Karen and Rebecca and son Bob and Keith Merkel.

Prior to that time Gary said that the bird was first observed on November 24th about 4 p.m. and that it had mostly remained under the many small spruces which surround the east and north part of the yard and that they at first thought it was a Common Grackle. This day however, with the temperature at thirty plus degrees and an excellent sunshiny day, the bird was really putting on a show, sitting on the rail of the deck, flying around the yard. The farthest point of observation was a mere thirty feet and the closest, eight feet.

With the weather being unseasonably warm the bird was only sporadically observed for most of the next week. We had tried on a couple of occasions to trap the bird and then on December 26 (one month after it was first observed) at about 4:15 p.m. we caught and banded the bird. It was observed to be in excellent physical condition. We could not discern an incubation patch. We felt we could not sex this bird nor age it although all references indicated that the orange-red eye is indicative of an adult bird.

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Nest Site Selectivity By The Goldfinch
In An Old Field Habitat
By Chris Worley

Birds display varying degrees of selectivity in the placement of their nests. During a recent study of the woody vegetation of an "old field" habitat I collected information on nest site selectivity by the Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*).

The study area, in DePere, Brown County, Wisconsin (Sec 28, T-23-N, R-20-E), is composed of two adjacent, but slightly different secondary successional habitats originally cleared for the construction of a radio tower. What will be referred to as the alpha section consists of a slightly more xeric condition than that of the beta section (lowland). Dimensions of the alpha area are approximately 250 x 23m. The beta area has dimensions of 69 x 36m.

Woody plant densities were estimated by the circle plot method (Brewer and McCann 1982) with a plot diameter of 8.0m. Three plots were established randomly every 50m. A total of 15 plots were taken. I also measured height and trunk diameter (measured at 5.0 cm above ground) of woody vegetation used for nesting.

I counted nests during the winter of 1985-86 when the absence of foliage facilitated nest location. Each nest was tagged to prevent accidental duplication of data. Nests were identified by dimensions, materials (presence of thistle seed), and habitat (Headstrom 1970). Followup surveys during the summer of 1986 confirmed that goldfinches were common at the study site during their breeding season.

The alpha section was composed of a slightly more diversified woody vegetation than that of the beta section. Grey dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) predominated, comprising 53% of the woody vegetation species. Young poplar (*Populus alba*) represented 23%, snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*) 16%, and the remaining 8% was a combination of several species. The mean height of grey dogwood was 166.6 cm. Diameter averaged 2.1 cm. Poplar ranged in height from 10.0 to 12.6m.

The beta section also contained primarily grey dogwood, which represented 95% of the woody vegetation. The remaining 5% included Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) and others. Average height of grey dogwood was 120.4cm. Diameter averaged 1.4cm.