

L. O. S. Bird Record's Committee Report Form

1. **English and scientific name:** Northern Wheatear. Oenanthe oenanthe.
2. **Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage:** 1 post-juvenile female or male, as suggested by the fresh plumage.
3. **Locality. Louisiana:** New Orleans, Orleans Parish.
4. **Date(s) seen:** 24 October 1991.
5. **Times of day seen:** 10:06 AM.
6. **Reporting observer and address:** Gwen and Al Smalley, 88 Egret Street, New Orleans, LA 70124.
7. **Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:** Nancy Newfield. Subsequent to the observations of the four persons named herein, there were many observers who saw the bird.
8. **Other observers who independently identified the bird:** The bird was first reported to us by Jennifer Coulson, who saw it October 23, 1991.
9. **Light conditions:** Partly cloudy. Conditions were good for photography.
10. **Optical equipment:** 10 X Zeiss; 7 X Zeiss.
11. **Distance to bird:** Approximately 15-50 feet.
12. **Duration of observation:** About 15 minutes. We were prevented from longer observation and additional photography because of prolonged discussion with security personnel of Folger's Coffee, on whose premises the bird was located.
13. **Habitat:** Mowed lawns in an industrial complex.
14. **Behavior:** Bird sat on a wooden railing or a chainlink fence with occasional sorties to the lawn. Constantly wagged tail and occasionally flicked wings. When Gwen approached to take pictures, bird "bobbed". Other observers commented that the bird became somewhat more shy subsequent

to our observations.

15. Description: About the size of a bluebird (Sialis) with overall light brown color. Back light brown with a slight olive tone. Throat and breast was slightly ruddy, or buffy, more noticeable laterally than in the midline. Belly light brownish, vent white. Top of head and nape grey-brown. Supercilium lighter brown, almost white, than head or auricular patch, the superciliary lines extending narrowly over the front. Auricular area brownish, well defined.

Bill black, long (almost one-half as long as head length), slender, but thicker at base, the attenuation being gradual so that the culmen was not sharply curved or hooked. Legs black.

Tail of moderate length, white below with distal part black, except for white tip. Undertail coverts white. Rump white. Upper surface of tail white with black "T" (see sketch).

Wing without conspicuous wingbars, the secondary area slightly reddish. Wings rather scruffy looking. It appeared to us that the wing coverts had molted and not completely grown back. The outer web of the primaries dark. This field mark was not noted by us in the field, but is evident from the photographs.

16. Voice: None heard.

17. Similar species: This bird had the typical build, habits, and upright posture of chats. We do not know of any chats other than wheatears that have the characteristic tail pattern of the subject bird. Wagtails have white in the wing (at least white in the wingbars and white edgings to the "tertials", often additional patterns) and besides are slim and long-tailed, with a lateral rather than upright stance.

Worldwide, there are about 22 species of Oenanthe. Most of them can be eliminated by tail pattern and other field marks. We have examined figures or read descriptions of all species. The most similar to O. oenanthe is O. isabellina, which can be eliminated by its whiter belly, larger bill at the base, differently shaped supercilium, poorly defined auricular area, lighter web of outer primaries, slimmer build and more upright stance. The "T" shaped black pattern in the tail is also very different.

Black-eared Wheatear (O. hispanica) in basic plumage does not have the distinct eyeline of O. oenanthe, has a white throat and belly, and in typical

individuals has a much narrower terminal black band on the tail.

Pied Wheatears (O. pleschanka) in winter show buffy edgings to the scapulars, lack the conspicuous auricular patch of "our" bird and have darker breasts without the buffy appearance of O. oenanthe.

In addition, Northern Wheatear is the only species which breeds in the Western Hemisphere and even considering the pattern of vagrancy of Eurasian wheatears, is clearly the most likely species to appear in southeastern United States, and the only species previously recorded in the A.O.U. Checklist area.

18. Photographs: Five color slides by Gwen Smalley attached. One submitted for publication

19. Previous experience with species: Gwen in Alaska, and Al and Gwen on several occasions in England. We have seen four other species in Spain, Israel, and Africa. We are not experienced with species occurring outside their normal ranges.

20. Aids: Books etc. (a) at time of observation: None.

(b) after observation: Numerous field guides. Our best references were Woodcock's illustrations in "The Birds of Oman" by Michael Gallagher; the series of excellent illustrations, both paintings by Alan Harris and photos by numerous persons, in the article by Peter Clement ["Field identification of West Palearctic wheatears", British Birds, 80(4):137-157, (5):187-238, 1987]; and Cramp et al., "Handbook of the Birds of Europe the Middle East etc.", Vol. 5. Clement's article also included the wheatears likely to stray from the eastern Palearctic. The species not included are the Middle Eastern and North African endemics, i.e., the least likely candidates for vagrancy to the western hemisphere. The photographs in Clement's article also helped us evaluate illustrations (many of them very poor) in various field guides.

In addition, we studied the slides attached to this report, and the photos taken by David Muth. We discussed our observations with Dr. Joseph Feldner, who has netted and banded numerous Northern Wheatears in Austria, and studied the identification of similar wheatears which might occur in Europe. In particular, Joseph was able to comment on the more upright stance and slimmer appearance of Isabelline Wheatear compared with Northern Wheatear.

21. This description written from: X notes made during observation; notes made after observation; X memory.

22. Are you positive of your observation? Yes.

23. Signatures of reporters:



24. Date and time of this account: October 24, 1991, 9:00 PM, with some revisions made the same evening after a draft was printed out. Additional revisions December 17, subsequent to survey of literature and examination of slides detailed above.

10:06 24 Oct 1991

Small bird, about length of
song sp. (also noted for)
Generally light brown -
slight olive cast. Breast slightly
puffed. Bill long, slender, ~~streaked~~
black. Iris ^{near eye} deep red. Legs dark
black. ^{nape} ^{also front}
Top of head, brown (greyish-brown)

Underpart of tail & coverts white,
w/ black distal half. Rump white.

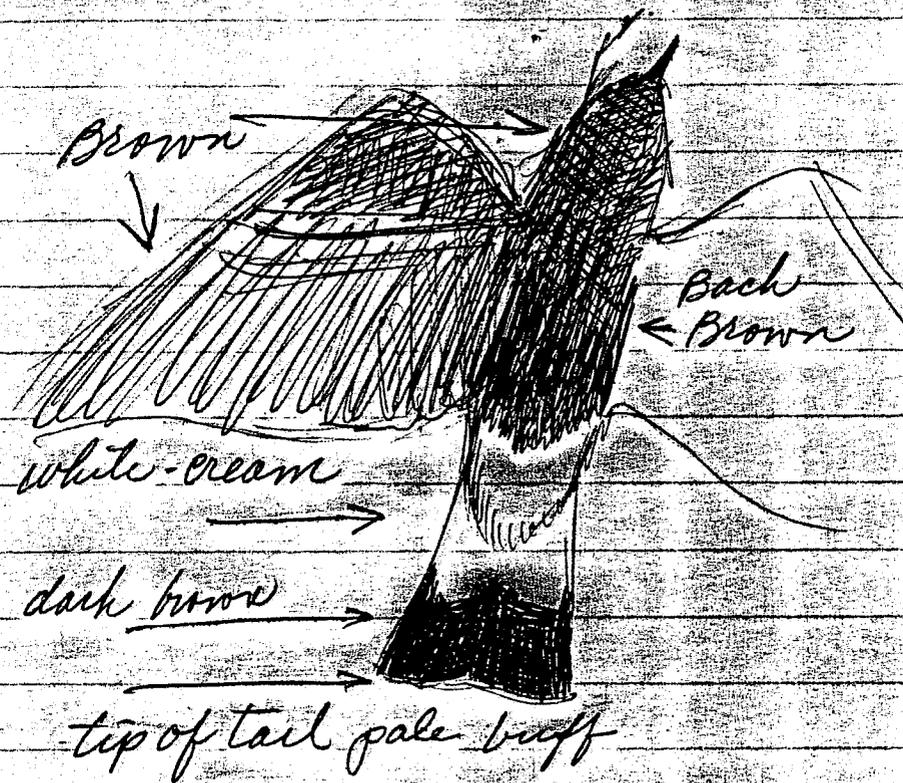
Bill about 1/2 of head. Legs black.

Flaps tail constantly, occasionally
flutters wings ^{up & down}
when I am approached for camera
shots.

Wing feathers appear to be molting -

Partly cloudy - excellent vis.

As close as 18 feet



**REPORT TO THE
LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE**

1. Common and scientific name:
Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*
2. Number of individuals seen, sexes, ages, general plumage, etc.
One bird, probably an immature
3. Locality:
New Orleans, LA, just west of the fence around the Folger's coffee plant, 14601 Old Gentilly Rd, New Orleans LA 70129
4. Date(s) when seen:
October 24, 1991
5. Times of day when seen:
From 4 PM to a little after 5 PM.
6. Reporting observer and address:
John P. Sevenair, 325 Stafford Place, New Orleans, LA 70124
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:
Mac Myers, David Muth, Norton Nelkin, Fred and Bit Barry, Peter Yawkey, Bruce Crider and his aunt; Jim Felner and Norman Farve of Folger's.
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird:
→ Jennifer Outlaw Colson (of the Louisiana Nature and Science Center) and her husband Tom found the bird the day before. Gwen and Al Smalley and Nancy Newfield also saw the bird.
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and amount of light):
The weather was partly cloudy. Most of the time the light was bright and diffuse. Occasionally the clouds opened and the bird was in direct sunlight. There was no significant shade near the bird.
10. Optical equipment:
Zeiss 7x42 binoculars (when the bird was flying).
Bushnell Spacemaster scope with 20x eyepiece.
Fred Barry's Questar scope (briefly).
11. Distance to bird:
Thirty to 150 feet.
12. Duration of observation:
Slightly over an hour.
13. Habitat (general and specific):
A large, open, freshly mowed grassy area with a blacktop road running through it and a blacktop parking lot behind it. The bird perched on the railing of a wooden footbridge, on a chain link fence, and once (briefly) on the Folger's plant building.
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification):
At first the bird was sitting on the wooden fence railing with its feet hidden. Soon it stood up. Sometimes it would lift one foot into its belly plumage and stand on the other, appearing to be one-legged. It often flew from one perch to another, and occasionally dropped to the grass. Once, while standing in some gravel, it picked something up in its bill and beat it on the ground several times. When standing the bird wagged its tail up and down, with a fairly slow bobbing movement that was smooth rather than jerky.

15. Description (Include what was actually seen, not what should have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc.)

The bird was larger than a warbler but smaller than the Loggerhead Shrike that chased it briefly. It had a chunky thrushlike silhouette and a medium sized, straight, thrushlike bill. Its bill, legs, and feet were black (or very dark brown); its eye was black.

The top of its head and its back were a flat, medium brown in color. The bird had a white line above the eye. An "ear patch" extended back from the eye under the supercilium; this patch was slightly darker than the surrounding area above and below, and had some buffy color to it. The area below the eye and the ear patch was smooth and unstreaked, with some buffy wash. There was a small pale area that extended back and down from the base of the lower mandible.

The buffy area of the lower face and throat blended to a pale brown or tan color on the breast. There was a fairly abrupt boundary between the tan of the breast and upper belly and the white of the vent area.

The front part of the sitting bird's wing (the lesser and median wing coverts?) had a pebbled or spotted look. There was a straight line of feathers where the greater coverts ended; this was not a wingbar. The primaries and secondaries were dark brown or black, with buffy feather edges evident especially on the secondaries.

Both the vent and the rump were white. When the bird was sitting and its tail was not spread, the tail was black both above and below. The tip of the tail was slightly forked and had a pale edge. The side of the part of the tail closest to the body was white. When the bird spread its tail in flight or right after landing, the black tail band appeared to be fairly broad, with a "peak" of greatest breadth in the center. The band didn't have the true T shape of adult wheatears. See the tail sketches in the field notes.

16. Voice:

Not heard.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observations):

The Catharus thrushes are the North American birds that are the most similar to this one in shape, and they all have streaks on their breasts, as this bird does not. In fact, the distinctive tail pattern eliminates everything but other wheatears, none of which have ever been seen in North America as far as I know. I will leave the elimination of such species as Isabelline Wheatear to others.

18. Photographs:

Gwen Smalley took pictures (slides). David Muth, Mac Myers, and Bruce Crider also attempted to take photos of the bird.

19. Previous experience with this species:

None. I've seen several other wheatears, most recently the Desert Wheatear (China, 1990).

20. Aids: List books, illustrations, birders, etc. used in identification

a) At the time of observation:

Mac Myers had a European guide with him that I looked at briefly. I forget which one it was.

b) After observation:

I checked several guides, but nothing in my library has good pictures of juvenile wheatears for comparison purposes. I talked with Gwen and Al Smalley about the bird and got the scientific name from the National Geographic guide.

21. This description written from: x Notes made during observation; _____ notes made after observation; _____ memory.

A copy of the field notes is enclosed.

22. Are you positive of your identification? yes If not, explain:

See note on Isabelline Wheatear above.

23. Signature of reporter:

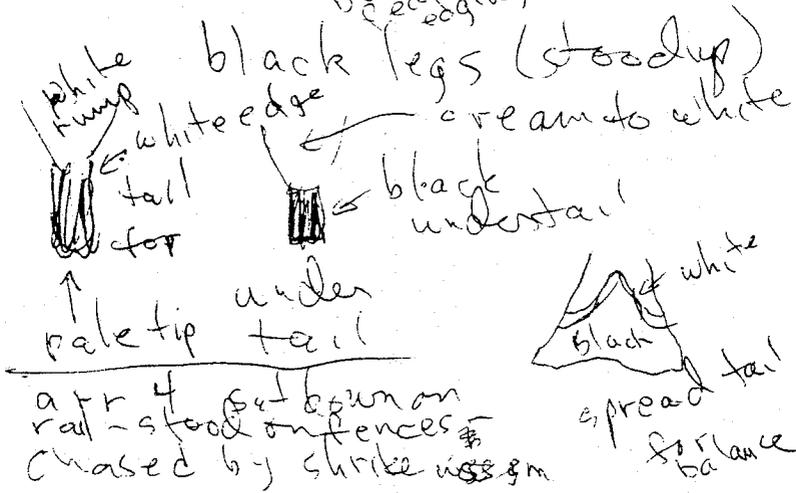
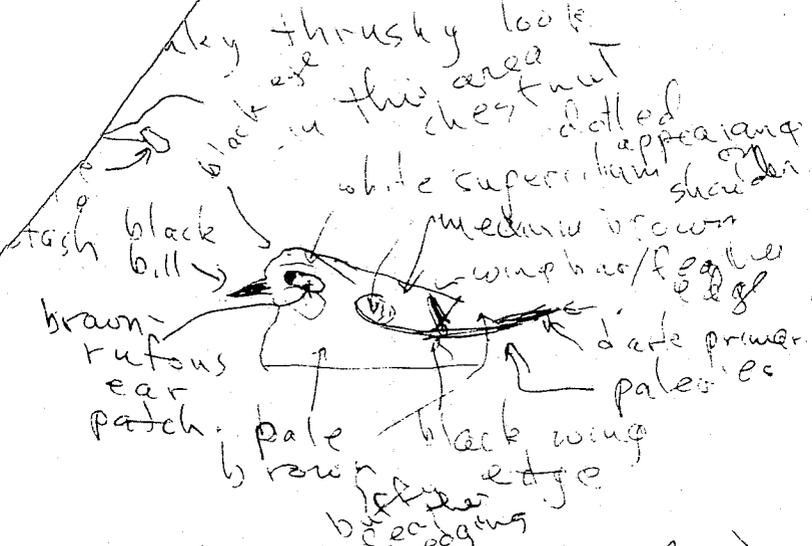
John P. Savenau

24. Date and time of writing this account:

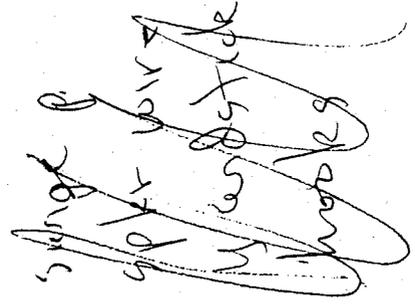
Finished at 10:50 PM, October 24, 1991.

Norman Farve
 7341 Beaconfield
 NO 70128

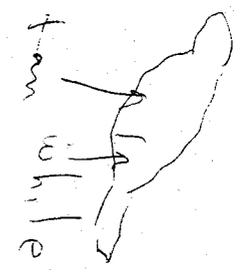
14601 Old Gentryly
 70129
 Edger's Coffee



~~Stone Mill Sta~~
 N. West
 283-2279
 coffee
 1260-16th
 3130-4:30
 Sq Orinda
 Lakeville



Bal in the fork
 in tail



LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

Species: Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Number: One, basic, sex?, age? (not adult male).

Locality: Folger's Coffee Plant, Gentilly Road, New Orleans East

Date: Oct. 24, 26 1991

Time: 4:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m.

Reporter: David P. Muth, 1617 Charlton Dr., N.O., La. 70122

With Reporter: Norton Nelkin, Mac Myers, etc. etc. etc.

Other Observers: Found by Jennifer Coulson Oct. 23; confirmed a.m. Oct. 24 by Al and Gwen Smalley; please consult John Sevenair for last date seen.

Light: Both days mostly overcast, a little sunlight came through as the sun set Oct. 24.

Optics: Zeiss Dialyt 10x40, Bushnell Spacemaster 25x, Questar, etc.

Distance: As close as 15 feet.

Duration: About one hour 10/24, one hour 10/26.

Habitat: Short mowed grass field around buildings and parking lot.

Behavior: Very active, bobbing tail like a waterthrush, spreading tail, and flicking wings, sometimes both wings and sometimes only one. Usually perched either on fence, a wooden footbridge rail, or a sign. From these perches it would make sallies to the ground where it would catch insects and return to a perch. Occasionally it would land on the grass and search for insects by stretching and craning, like a mockingbird. Rarely stayed long in one place, often flying a hundred meters or so to a new perch.

Description:

A little smaller than a bluebird but a similar shape, though generally different stance.

Bill short, narrow and pointed, black, with a tuft of bristles

at the base of the upper mandible. Eye and legs also black.

Top of head, nape, and back gray-brown. Buffy superciliary stripes extended to meet above bill, creating a narrow buffy forecrown. A dark eyestripe extended from the lores and behind the eye outlining the top of a nearly chestnut auricular patch. This chestnut color was most intense in the auricular patch; it faded to buff on the throat and breast, to pale buff or off-white in the belly, intensified slightly in the flanks, finally becoming white in the undertail coverts. Breast very faintly streaked.

Wings were darker in general than the back, showing contrast. Flight feathers dark gray-brown, those visible in the folded wing broadly edged with light buff. Greater coverts browner (lighter) than flight feathers, broadly edged buffy, creating a bar in the folded wing. Lesser, and median coverts brown, tipped with white or light buff. Axillars and underwing light brown or buffy.

Rump and uppertail coverts pure white. Tail white with a black inverted "t". (Or black with white....) Central tail feathers black throughout length (except tip). Outer tail feathers white proximally, black distally about one third of length. White-black interface was clean-cut. Tail feathers tipped very slightly buffy white. Outer webs of proximal half of outermost retrices were white, i.e., no black "outline".

Voice: "Chek" note (variously described as "tack" or "chack" for this species in literature).

Similar Species:

There are about 14 species of wheatear. Only one, Northern Wheatear is known from North America, and it is the only one to be expected. Of the fourteen, ten have a female/immature basic plumage which is at least superficially similar to Northern.

Isabelline Wheatear--This species generally shows far more black in the tail, with a much less pronounced "t" effect. However, some immatures can have a pattern similar to Northern. Isabelline has a longer bill, thicker at the base, showing more of a chisel shape. Isabelline has paler wings, thus it shows much less contrast between wing and back. It also has a very dark alula which contrasts strongly with the wing coverts. It is said to have a strikingly pale underwing.

Black-eared Wheatear--This species has a less convincing tail-band, often incomplete. The black extends up the outer web of the outer retrix, partially outlining the white tail. It has dark axillars and underwing coverts.

Pied Wheatear--Usually shows a tail pattern like Black-eared;

even when tail pattern is most similar to Northern, some of the outer web of the outer retrices is outlined in black. Pied has dark underwing coverts and axillars.

All other species of wheatears either have strikingly different tail patterns or colors (Desert, White-crowned Black, Hooded, Red-rumped, Red-tailed), or lack the warm buffy underparts of basic-plumaged Northern Wheatears, (Mourning, Finsch's, Eastern Pied, Hume's, Black). As far as I can tell, no other wheatears can show buffy underwings, except Isabelline which always shows buffy or pale underwings. Northern, *apparently* shows buffy underwings in fresh basic plumage of immatures and, as near as I can tell, adult females. I assume this buffiness wears away to reveal darker feathering. I have not found unequivocal statements concerning this in the sources available to me.

Photos: Yes, by several people. Some of mine are attached. I've sent in photos that show things that might not be visible in others' photos--the underwing, the outermost retrix, etc. Others (Gwen Smalley, Dan Purrington) obtained better photos of the bird in general.

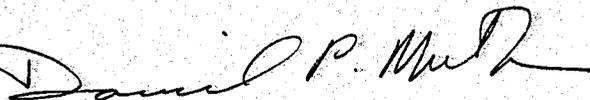
Previous Experience: None.

Aids: Mostly two articles in *British Birds* Volume 80 nos. 4 and 5, and Cramp *et al.*, *Birds of the Western Palearctic*.

Circumstance of Description: Written from tape-recorded notes made in the field 10/26, and from examination of my photos.

Confidence Level: I'm essentially positive of this identification. I am a little disappointed that I could not find an unequivocal description of the underwings in all plumages. Obviously, I have absolutely no experience with this genus and feel that experts should probably be consulted if LSUMNS lacks a sufficient series of skins to compare with the photos.

Signature:



David P. Muth

Date: 12/11/91

LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of unusual birds. It may be used flexibly and need not be used at all. Leave blank any details not observed. Attach additional sheets if necessary. Please print or type. Attach drawings, photographs, etc.; include all photos if an obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to the Secretary of the LOS Bird Records Committee.

1. Common and scientific name: Northern Wheatear Oenanthe oenanthe
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g. 2ad. in breeding plumage): One
3. Locality: Louisiana: Eastern New Orleans Parish: Orleans
Folgers Coffee Co. Facility West of NASA Michoud Facility
4. Date(s) when seen: 30 October 1991
5. Times of day when seen: 0625 - 0630 hours
6. Reporting observer and address: Christopher G. Brantley
721 Heavens Dr. #3, Mandeville, LA 70448
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird: Jim Holmes, Sr. and Jim Holmes, Jr. informed me of the location and identity of this bird on 28 Oct 91.
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Fair; Time was just after sunrise, bird was in shade.
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Bushnell 7X50, Excellent Condition
11. Distance to bird: Approximately 10 meters
12. Duration of observation: Approximately 5 minutes
13. Habitat (general and specific): Bird was perched upon the top strand of barbed wire fencing surrounding the coffee plant. An open field is located next to the plant. Grass cover around the plant and in the field is maintained in a mowed condition.
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification): For the 5 minutes of observation time, the bird remained perched on the top strand of barbed wire fencing, facing towards the coffee plant and away from me.
15. Description (Include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc. Stress field marks):
Bird was facing away from me, which gave me an excellent view of back, rump, and tail. I had no view of chest and occasionally when the bird turned its head I was able to view side of head. Total length was approximately 6 inches (15 cm). Bird had a thin bill, dark eye, no eyering, smudge through eye with faint eyestripe immediately above eye. Rump was white with a dark band on outer edge of tail. Wings were dark with no wing bars; occasionally the bird drooped its wings to its side offering an excellent view of rump and tail. The back and sides were lighter in color compared to wing color. No view was available of the chest.

16. Voice: None

17. Similar species (include how they are eliminated by your observations):
Unfortunately, I did not consider additional species after being informed
by Jim Holmes, Sr. and Jim Holmes, Jr. of the identity of this bird.

18. Photographs (Was it photographed? By whom? Attached?): None

19. Previous experience with this species: None

20. Aids: List books, illustrations, birders, etc. used in identification
a) at time of observation: None

b) after observation: National Geographic Field Guide, 2nd Edition, 1987.

21. This description written from: _____ notes made during observation; XXXXX notes
made after observation; _____ memory.

22. Are you positive of your identification? YES . If not, explain:

23. Signature of reporter: *Christopher G. Brantley*

24. Date and time of writing this account: 17 November 1991, 2000 hours