

Bell's Vireo

Unanimously Accepted 7-0

Committee Member Comments:

CM1: Drab vireos can sometimes be difficult to identify, especially since there can be wide variation among subspecies, and plumage patterns can vary according to the age of the bird or the time of year. Given that, it appears that this bird looks good for Bell's Vireo. I compared the photographs with online images of this species and similar vireo species and can't imagine what else it could be. My only concern with this report is that there was no mention of tail bobbing, which Bell's vireo does. The bird may not have bobbed its tail during the observation, or this is something that the observer simply didn't note.

CM2: This is a well-documented report of a bird long expected to show up in WV for the official State List. Photographs leave no real doubt as to the ID. Timing certainly fits with a western vagrant. Good job by the observer to not immediately pass this off as another species and properly document it. A vote FOR acceptance is warranted in my opinion. Great sighting!

CM3: The images are most consistent with a Bell's Vireo. The pronounced white spectacles present on blue-headed vireo is absent in this bird.

CM4: This was not a slam-dunk conclusion after reviewing the submitted report, but more of the weighing of probability that it could be a Bell's Vireo, versus a Blue-headed Vireo with very faded plumage. My personal experience with the Bell's Vireo has been slam-dunk unquestionable in its range states when I have had bird song present. The Bell's Vireo song is very distinctive, and hard to confuse with other vireos. Since this bird was silent, other factors needed to be weighted in. We were fortunate to have reasonably good photos of the bird in question, and for a bird that moves very quickly through brush, the photos were surprisingly good. The time of year for this observation was late breeding season or after, so the plumage would be expected to be fading or drab on migrants. The reporting birder did a good job comparing to Red-eyed Vireo size and also to a visual of the Blue-headed Vireo. The id feature that I weighed heavily on was the stout or heavy looking bill shown in the submitted photos, and in particular, the angle the bird was photographed in. I searched for actual photos of Bell's Vireo in a similar angle in field guides and on the internet. I was able to find one photo on allaboutbirds.org of the Bell's Vireo where the heavy bill looks exactly as it does in the submitted photos. Also a photo in the iBirdPro app also at a similar angle looks like the bill on the submitted photos. I did not find such photos in a search of the Blue-headed Vireo. The thin dark eye line showed up well in one of the submitted photos, suggesting Bell's Vireo. The pale bill was clearly shown also. I was hoping that a bobbing tail had been observed, which the Eastern subspecies does, but it was not mentioned. Since all other plumage characteristics seen in

the submitted photos lean toward Bell's Vireo rather than Blue-headed Vireo, my decision was solidified on behavior and habitat the observed bird was seen in. The Bell's Vireo preferred habitat is tangled shrubbery and brushy areas, often including wetlands. They are not known to feed in the canopy of mature forests, like a Blue-headed Vireo. This bird in question also never moved above eye level, even when taller trees and larger bushes were present. Because the reported bird was observed in ideal Bell's Vireo habitat, I believe the probability that this observed bird is a Bell's Vireo is enough for me to vote in support of the record.

CM5: I vote to include the Thomas, WV sighting of the Bell's Vireo on the state list. First, I want to commend Leo Dilling for exemplary submission. The written description has good detail with research references and includes photographs. The observer acknowledged no previous experience, made good mental notes and consulted experienced birds. He was able to differentiate the bird from the Blue-headed. His photographic evidence differentiates from similar species, Warbling Vireo and other vireos. The pictures show faint eye ring, blunt-tipped bill, brownish-gray overall with flanks washed yellow. The wings show two wing bars with the lower one being more distinct. A review of eBird reports show this mid-west bird to be reported along the east coast from Canada to Florida. This September sighting would be consistent with the bird's fall migration. Therefore, this report meets the standard set by the by-laws for inclusion on the official State List.

CM6: Great find and plenty of good photos. Just proves the saying about the right place and the right time AND then paying attention to your surroundings. The ONLY thing that bothers me about this observation is that I was there that started to ride up that way ... but changed my mind.

CM7: As someone who has seen numerous Bell's Vireo in IN and IL, I was skeptical about a Bell's Vireo in Thomas, WV. Without photos I would not have voted to accept this species due to their restless behavior and numerous similar species. However, the photos tell the tale, as usual. The thick, slightly downward tipped bill indicate a vireo, immediately ruling out all warblers, such as Tennessee Warbler, and the white eye-ring broken by a dark/black line all the way through is indicate of a Bell's Vireo. Blue-headed Vireos and Cassin's Vireos have a white eye-ring that is only broken toward the front. The one distinct wing bar and paler upper wing bar with olive back and yellowish wash on the flanks/underside also are indicative of the Eastern race of Bell's Vireo. The only other Vireo with this much yellowish flank coloration is the White-eyed Vireo, but that species has two distinct wing bars and doesn't have the broken white eye-ring. The last photo also shows the bluish gray legs typical of a Bell's Vireo, and other Vireos. Philadelphia Vireo, which also has quite a bit of yellow flanking, was ruled out by the eye-ring and wing bars. Other Vireo species, Warbling Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo, were also ruled out by the eye-ring and wing bars. The one hesitation I have about the ID is that the Bell's Vireos I have seen in the past typically have a rounded head and this one had a flattened head. However, this species does fluff its crown feathers for effect, especially in breeding time when I have seen most of them, and the Eastern population can have a more flattened head than other vireos. A great find for that region of the state!