

Anhinga
17 Sep 1996
Lake Darling S.P., Washington Co., IA
*Stephen J. Dinsmore
IBL 67:19, 82

Record Number: 96-45
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014 [10/14/97;
*5/26/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:19
Records Committee: IBL 67:82, 68:87
Dinsmore, S. J. 1998. Anhinga at Lake Darling State Park. IBL
68:65-66.
Eckert, K. R. 1989. Proceedings of the Minnesota
Ornithological Records Committee. Loon 61:10-13.

LETTERS

Kim Eckert to Tom [Kent], 5 Feb 1997
[Stephen J. Dinsmore] to Tom Kent, 13 Nov 1997
H. David Bohlen to Thomas H. Kent, 7 Jan 1998
Ben Garmon to Chris [Edwards]. 4 Mar 1998
Lex Glover to Chris Edwards, 7 Mar 1998
Greg Lasley to Chris Edwards, 8 Mar 1998
Donna L. Dittman to Chris [Edwards], 9 Mar 1998

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

NA, The wing span being 50% greater than a Broad-winged Hawk (34x1.5=51"WS) would make Double-crested (52"WS) more likely than Anhinga (45"WS) per to NG. However, the pencil-thin neck and long tail certainly say Anhinga. Because the observer only saw a silhouette at 500 meters I think the information is too weak to completely eliminate cormorant.

A-D, The soaring silhouette of an Anhinga is very distinctive and Dinsmore describes it well. The thin neck with no appreciable head and long tail are diagnostic.

NA, This record was accepted by Ken Brock, and I too think that the details support the identification. However, in view of the Minnesota records that were accepted and then later rejected (Loon 61:12-13), I sent the documentation to Kim Eckert for his opinion. His response is attached.

A-D, The description is very good for this species but I still remember the MN record that was reviewed and voted down the second time, after being accepted at first, and I think we need to discuss this record between committee members in conjunction with the Minnesota record.

A-D, Observer carefully eliminates likely other possibilities.
RE-VOTE (by mail): 2 A-D, 5 NA

NA, The distance and similarity to Double-crested Cormorant is troubling enough to NA this sighting. However, the experience, ability and proven accuracy of this observer makes it hard to discount.

updraft and it became apparent that it was a Double-crested Cormorant at this point. These birds can fool just about anybody, experienced birder or not. I think the short duration of the sighting is against this particular record. I have seen a Double-crested Cormorant soar in this manner and the documenter here presents no new evidence or interpretation of the evidence to change my mind on this record. No need to go again to an outside reviewer either.

A-D, Interpretation of the RC based on incorrect evidence (MN actions) (PTO). I strongly disapprove of the RC dismissing this record based on actions in Minnesota. The clear difference between the two situations is that the observer in MN withdrew his record voluntarily when he later realized that he may have made an error. I believe also that the MN RC acted hastily and possibly incorrectly in withdrawing all the MN records of Anhinga. To me, this is a baseless, incorrect action. As to the record at hand: it must be judged on its merits. It would be a travesty if a decision is made based on the Minnesota actions. As I did previously, I vote A-D.

REVOTE (at meeting of 19 Apr 1998 with additional letters from outside reviewers): 7 A-D.

NA, After reading Kim Eckert's comments, I don't believe a bird soaring at such a distance can be identified.

NA, Will reverse vote after considering Eckert's comments. The distant observation does not eliminate the default bird, cormorant.

A-D, A Double-crested Cormorant has a neck which is always longer than the tail (in flight) and looks conspicuously large-headed and thick-necked when seen overhead. The Minnesota observer backed off because the bird stretched its neck out and seemed Anhinga-like -- indicating he was relying strictly on head and neck shape, rather than the entire appearance of the bird. It's very easy to make a DCCO into an Anhinga in this manner, unless careful attention is paid to the tail length and wing shape, as Steve did. Perhaps the most telling statement is "the tail was noticeably longer than the length of the neck". Corms may stretch their necks out, but not their tails. The citation in The Loon repeatedly says the tail was about the same length as the head and neck, not longer.

NA, I don't know, so I take the conservative view and go along with Eckert.

NA, I agree with info from article in the Loon and comments from Kim Eckert. A bird from this distance with a thin neck and flared tail could possibly be a Double-crested Cormorant as experienced in MN. Therefore I do not think that this record is beyond reasonable doubt.

A-D, Unless the observer withdraws the record himself (as in MN) I will keep to my original vote. Obviously the MN observer was unsure of his ID, and was convinced of such when seeing soaring DCCO later. This has no bearing on the competence of SJD and his identification.

PRELIMINARY RE-REVIEW (by mail, Dec 1997): 3 A-D, 1 NA, 3 waiting

A-D, I've been a strong proponent of this record all along and urge a re-review perhaps based on the criterion of "new interpretation of the evidence". Although actions by another committee on an entirely different record should not be discounted (indeed they should serve to help educate us), we need to be careful that we do not subrogate other actions for our own. I'm not totally convinced that we evaluated the evidence before us. If we throw out the line: "I have never seen one [DCCO] soar in this manner", a line which seems to have caused doubt but which requires subjective interpretation, the description of the bird itself seems pretty straight-forward.

I would call it "interpretation of the committee based on incorrect opinions". Does that call for a re-review? I hope so. I would have voted A-D.

wait

NA, In the spring of 1997 I located a bird that I would describe as being the same as this documentation and had a much better look at it at quite a bit closer range. To me the bird I saw was a classic example of an Anhinga in flight with a long pencil-like neck, dagger-like bill and long fanned tail as it was soaring upward on a thermal. The bird then left the thermal

96-45

White-winged Crossbill: Easily, this was the invasion species of the season. It was reported from about 37 locations, all in the northern two-thirds of the state. High counts included 20-50 on 23-24 Jan at Fairmount Cemetery in Davenport (JLF), 38 on 5 Jan at Sioux City (BFH), 37 on 31 Dec at LeMars in Plymouth Co. (SJD), 35 on 27 Dec. at Sheldon in O'Brien Co. (Gordon Brown fide SJD, JV), 26 on 13 Dec in Dickinson Co. (LAS), 25 on 13 Feb at Muscatine (JU, THK), and 25 on 6 Dec at Arnold's Park Cemetery in Dickinson Co. (ET). This species was also reported on 9 CBCs.

Common Redpoll: A good year with reports from about 15 locations, numbers ranged up to 110 during February at Red Rock Res. (AB, AMJ, JLF, CE). Other high counts were 60 on 18 Dec at Union Slough N.W.R. (MCK), 40 on 2 Dec north of Pleasantville in Marion Co. (AB), and 35 on 13 Dec in Dickinson Co. (LAS). 116 were reported on the Saylorville CBC (RRe, MJ).

Pine Siskin: Reported from about 11 locations statewide. The most were 35 on 8 Dec in Des Moines (PJW), 30 during December-January near Missouri Valley in Harrison Co. (RRe), 26 on 11 Jan at the State Forest Nursery in Ames (MJ), 24 during December-January at another Ames location (Dave Edwards fide HZ), and 20 on 2 Dec at the Iowa Falls Cemetery in Hardin Co. (MPR). There were more reports than last year, but still much less common than normal

Evening Grosbeak: 1 was reported on 20 Dec at the Cherokee CBC.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow: The usual birds were found at Tama Road in Des Moines Co. (AB), and Sampson Road in Muscatine Co. (PHA, RIA, THK). 25 were found on the Keokuk CBC under the Des Moines R. bridge to Missouri (RIC).

COMMENT

Everyone was extremely prompt in getting their reports in, which makes life much more pleasant for field reports editors. I was pleased to receive a first report from Mike Overton of Ames and hope this will be the first of many from him. Overall, I received reports from 34 observers which, when transcribed, involved 30 typed pages of data. A year's experience at this has been a big help to me; not only have I improved my efficiency, but I hope I have greatly reduced the errors and omissions that I know I committed last year.

CONTRIBUTORS

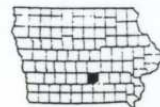
Pam H. Allen (PHA), West Des Moines; Reid I. Allen (RIA), West Des Moines; Neil Bernstein (NBe), Cedar Rapids; Dick Bierman (DBi), Cherokee; Aaron Brees (AB), Cherokee; Manit Bunnimit (MBu), Omaha, NE; Dennis Carter (DCe), Decorah; Robert I. Cecil (RIC), Des Moines; James J. Dinsmore (JJD), Ames; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Ft. Collins, CO.; Chris Edwards (CE), North Liberty; Peter Ernzen (PE), Ida Grove; James L. Fuller (JLF), Iowa City; Jacob T. Gilliam (JTG), Norwalk; Robert Gruenewald (RGr), Sanborn; William F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City, NE.; Maridel Jackson (MJ), Ankeny; Thomas N. Johnson (TNJ), Mystic; Jack Jones (JJo), Sioux City; Matthew C. Kenne (MCK), Algona; Thomas H. Kent (THK), Iowa City; Curt Nelson (CuN), Mason City; Michael D. Overton (MO), Ames; Babs K. Paddleford (BKP), Bellevue, NE.; Loren J. Paddleford (LJP), Bellevue NE.; Diane C. Porter (DCP), Fairfield; Beth Proescholdt (BPr), Liscomb; Mark Proescholdt (MPr), Liscomb; Russell Reisz (RRe), Missouri Valley; Lee A. Schoenewe (LAS), Spencer; Jim Sinclair (JSi), Indianola; *Brian L. Smith, (BLS), Rockwell City; Ed Thelen (ET), Spirit Lake; Dennis Thompson (DT), Johnston; *Richard Trieff, Indianola; John Van Dyk (JV), Sioux Center; Hank Zaletel (HZ), Nevada.

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ICELAND GULL AT RED ROCK RESERVOIR

AARON E. BREES

On the afternoon of 19 March 1997, I stopped below Red Rock Dam in Marion County, where a large flock of gulls had gathered on some exposed gravel bars. Among the numerous Herring and Ring-billed gulls, I noticed an extremely pale, medium-sized gull. I quickly took several photographs of the bird as well as taking notes and making a field sketch.



The bird was similar in size to the Ring-billed Gulls except that it was slightly taller and bulkier. It was much smaller and more lightly built than any of the Herring Gulls. The bird's head was very rounded with dark eyes. The bill was short and thin and appeared all black at a distance. A closer view showed that the basal two thirds was actually very dark grey, while the tip was black. The most striking feature of the bird was that its plumage appeared to be entirely white. After studying the bird more closely, I was able to see some dark barring on the undertail coverts and some lighter, faded barring on the upperwing coverts. At one point, a passing Bald Eagle flushed the gull flock, providing a view of the bird in flight. This allowed me to confirm that the tail, rump, and wings were white and unmarked.

After observing the bird for a while, I decided that it was a first-year Iceland Gull. The bill structure and color along with the small size of the bird eliminated first-year Glaucous Gull as a possibility. The extensive white coloration of the bird eliminated first-year Herring Gull as well as first-year Thayer's Gull.

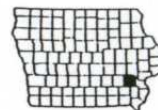
On 21 March, I returned to Red Rock but was unable to relocate the bird. There were very few gulls present anywhere on the lake and it appeared that the majority of the birds had left the area. This bird represents the second record for Red Rock and the tenth and latest spring record of Iceland Gull for Iowa (Kent and Dinsmore, *Birds in Iowa*, 1997).

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ANHINGA AT LAKE DARLING STATE PARK

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 17 September 1996 I was birding at Lake Darling State Park in Washington County. I was walking along the east shore of the lake when I noticed that several Broad-winged Hawks kettling overhead. Every minute or two I glanced up, until the kettle contained nine birds. When I next glanced up at 4:42 p.m., I saw another single bird that I initially assumed would be another hawk. When I put my binoculars on it, I noted the long, fairly broad, pointed wings, long, skinny neck, and very long tail. Within a couple of seconds, I recognized the silhouette as that of an Anhinga, even though the bird was soaring at an estimated height of 500 meters. Because of the great distance, I was not able to see many details of the bird's plumage. However, there was a line of contrast on the breast, separating the bird's dark belly from a paler neck and upper breast. I watched the bird until 4:50 p.m. and noted the following. Throughout the observation, the bird soared lazily towards the southwest, eventually joining the kettle of Broad-winged Hawks. While soaring, the bird occasionally gave a couple of shallow wingbeats. The bird's



silhouette was distinctive. The skinny, almost pencil-thin neck was held straight in front of the bird, and lacked an obvious head. The tail was noticeably longer than the length of the neck and was fanned as the bird soared. The leading edges of the wings were straight and held perpendicular to the body. The only size comparison was with Broad-winged Hawks. This bird was clearly much larger, roughly twice the length of a Broad-winged Hawk. This bird's wingspan was also at least 50% greater. The identification was based largely on this flight silhouette. I concluded that the bird was a female or immature because of the paler neck and upper breast. This represents the second record of an Anhinga in Iowa. The other record was of a female or immature from 18-31 October 1953 near Riverton in Fremont County (Mrs. W. H. Collins, *Iowa Bird Life* 23:72, 1953).

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LAZULI BUNTING IN MILLS COUNTY

THOMAS H. KENT

A male Lazuli Bunting first appeared the feeder of Anna Leich in the Loess Hills of rural Mills County north of Glenwood about 6 p.m. on 23 May 1997. She noticed an unusual bird feeding on the seed that was spread on patio and, with the help of a field guide, identified it. I saw and photographed the bird on 27 May, and Reid Allen photographed it on 26 May.



Over the next week the bunting came to feed regularly and was seen by many visitors. It preferred to feed on the patio rather than at one of the several feeders that were regularly attended by other species. It usually dropped down to the ground from the trees in the back yard and returned at regular intervals during the day. It was easily frightened by movement or camera noise, but this was easily prevented by viewing from inside the house. It was present all day on 29 May but was not seen after that.

The Lazuli Bunting was slightly larger than American Goldfinches and slightly smaller than House Finches that were also present at the ground feeding area. It had a compact body and conical bill. It had a blue hood with sharp demarcation on the upper breast and less sharp demarcation on the nape. There was black around the eye and in the loreal area. The upper mandible was mostly dark and the lower mandible flesh-colored. On the front and below the blue, there



*Lazuli Bunting, Mills Co.,
26 May 1997, Reid Allen.*

was a band of cinnamon that curved from the sides to the center of the breast. It faded to white on the lower breast. The belly and under tail were white. The back, wings, and tail were nondescript brown-black with some blue shading, and the rump was blue. There was a prominent white upper wing bar and thinner brownish lower wing bar. The back was streaked. The legs were dark.

The location in the Loess Hill north of Glenwood has mixed open and wooded habitat with conifers present in the neighbor's yard to the north. Many species of

birds frequent the Leich's feeders. At this time there were about six Red Crossbills and several Pine Siskins. Mrs. Leich picked up and released a recently fledged Pine Siskin on 25 May.

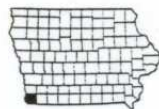
Prior to 1997 there were eight confirmed records of Lazuli Bunting for Iowa with seven from northwestern and one from southwestern Iowa and all from spring/early summer. This species has been found each year since 1994 and there are three other records from 1997. Also, four of the recent records have been at feeders. Does this represent an increased vagrancy of this species or just an increased awareness on the part of observers in western Iowa?

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPURS IN FREMONT COUNTY

BABS AND LOREN PADEFORD

On 12 April 1997, after a heavy snowfall on 11 April, we were in southern Fremont County looking for Chestnut-collared Longspurs. In late morning we encountered a flock of about 45 longspurs about one half mile north of Highway 2 on the Percival Road. The flock was foraging along the side of the road. In the flock of Lapland Longspurs, we identified two male Chestnut-collared in breeding plumage.



The birds were the size of the Lapland Longspurs with sparrow-like conical bills. The top of their heads was black. There was white above the eye and a black stripe through the eye. The throat was yellow. The nape of the neck was chestnut-colored. The belly and breast were black. The back was brown with brown streaks. The black tails showed more white along the sides than the Lapland Longspurs.

The two birds were feeding together on the road. Eventually the Lapland Longspurs flew, but the two Chestnut-collared Longspurs returned to feed for several minutes at a distance of about 30 to 50 feet from our car.

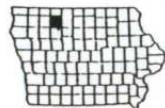
It is interesting to note that Tom Kent found Chestnut-collared Longspurs on the same date, 12 April, in 1995 in Sioux and Lyon counties in northwestern Iowa (IBL 66:61-63). We had previously found Chestnut-collared Longspurs in the same area in Fremont County on 22 and 23 April 1992 (IBL 62:81). All sightings occurred after heavy snowfall had concentrated migrating birds along the roads.

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LAZULI BUNTINGS TWO CONSECUTIVE YEARS IN CLAY COUNTY

LEE A. SCHOENEWE

On 29 May 1995, I had spent the day birding with Harold White and after arriving home in the late afternoon, I received a phone call from Harold. He had received a phone message that a Lazuli Bunting was visiting a feeder just south of Spencer. The feeder was located on the acreage of Russ and Ellen Heine, a beautifully landscaped farmstead with a variety of trees, shrubs, and plants. They have a small man-made pond with water pumped up and cascading over rocks into a



Cook Co. (vote 7-0; *The Loon* 61:38-39).

The following records were voted on July-December 1988, and found to be Unacceptable:

—Greater Scaup, 7/9/88, Carlos Avery WMA, Anoka Co. (vote 3-4).

Although it was agreed the observer may well have seen a Greater Scaup, the majority felt not enough was seen to eliminate Lesser Scaup. The identification was based on impressions of bill and body sizes, but there was no direct comparison available with anything to make these impressions diagnostic. The only other useful mark noted was the "flat-crowned" head-shape which tends to suggest Lesser Scaup more than Greater; also this scaup was apparently in eclipse plumage when head shape is unreliable.

—Cassin's Finch, 4/7/88, Crosby, Crow Wing Co. (vote 0-7).

It was agreed that the described face pattern, overall size, bill shape and undertail coverts all indicated this may well have been a female Cassin's Finch. The problem is that the observers were unable to see the bird long enough and well enough to provide a completely detailed description of these and other field marks. It was learned from the 1987 Duluth record that Cassin's vs. Purple Finch identification requires long and careful scrutiny of the bird involved along with good photos or meticulous written details, none of which were possible in this case.

—Mountain Plover, 7/2-5/86, Faribault Co. (vote 0-10; *The Loon* 58:154-158).

See *The Loon* 60:146-148 for a summary of why this previously accepted and published record was reconsidered; all ten members vote in cases of potential first state records.

—House Finch, 5/14/88, Golden Valley, Hennepin Co. (vote 1-6).

The identification was only based on the bird's song, which was not described in enough detail to eliminate Purple Finch.

—Osprey, 3/6/88, near Albert Lea, Freeborn Co. (vote 3-4).

The sketchy description only mentioned the wing profile and black wrist patches; the majority voted not to accept because the possibility of Rough-legged Hawk was not eliminated by these details.

—Northern Wheatear, 9/10/88, Maple Grove, Hennepin Co. (vote 0-7).

Although the description of the rump and tail would seem to indicate a wheatear, the ob-

server did not use binoculars during the observation, and none of the rest of the plumage was described; it was felt such an unusual species should have more complete documentation.

—Black-headed Grosbeak, 9/17/88, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co. (vote 0-7). The identification of this presumed female was based only on the "mostly" unstreaked "golden yellow" underparts; however, juvenile male Rose-breasteds can also match this pattern, and it is necessary to observe the color of the under wing linings to separate these two.

—House Finch, 7/31/88, Golden Valley, Hennepin Co. (vote 3-4).

It was agreed that this may well have been a female or immature House Finch, especially since so many had been in the Twin Cities recently; however, the undertail coverts were described as unstreaked which would tend to eliminate House Finch, and the tail appeared to be too deeply notched for a House Finch.

—House Finch, 3-31-4/18/88, Austin, Mower Co. (vote 0-7).

The identification of this female was based entirely on a less distinct facial pattern; however, the observer did not explain how he eliminated immature Purple Finch or Pine Siskin or even female Cassin's Finch, all of which have an indistinct face pattern.

—Anhinga, 7/22/88, Stewartville, Olmsted Co. (vote 1-6).

This identification was based on its wing-drying posture and orange-colored bill, but the observers apparently were unaware that cormorants dry their wings in the same way and that the orange at the base of their bill can make the bill itself appear orange. In flight the neck was described as "slightly bent," which also fits cormorant, and, even though the bird was seen perched at close range, there was no mention of the obvious white spotting on the wing coverts which even immature Anhingas would show.

—Acadian Flycatcher, 7/15/88, Black Dog L., Dakota Co. (vote 1-6).

This Empidonax was identified solely on the basis of its plumage; there was no direct comparison with any other bird, and more importantly no vocalization was ever heard. Nothing in the description eliminated the more likely possibility of an early fall migrant Alder Flycatcher.

—Pine Grosbeak, 6/30/88, Sax-Zim bog, St. Louis Co. (vote 3-4).

Although it was agreed the identification may well have been correct, the majority had too many doubts about the record since there was no mention of why White-winged Crossbill was eliminated, and the brief details also failed to mention anything about the observer's experience with the species, the light conditions, the duration of the observation, or the distance involved.

—Pine Grosbeak, 6/11/88, Sturgeon Lake, Pine Co. (vote 1-6).

Although this record's documentation was more detailed than the Sax-Zim record, there were still too many uncertainties for the majority to accept. The observer had no experience with this species, and the somewhat vague details were unclear about the presence or absence of wing bars and about how the bird's "much larger" size was determined.

—Anhinga, 9/20/82, Duluth, St. Louis Co. (vote 0-10; *The Loon* 55:28-30).

—Anhinga, 5/26/84, Louisville Swamp, Scott Co. (vote 1-9; *The Loon* 56:203).

—Anhinga, 4/27/85, near Buffalo, Wright Co. (vote 1-9; *The Loon* 58:46).

All ten members vote in cases of potential first state records. The observers in all three records based their identifications on: a long tail about the same length as the head and

neck, with two of the birds fanning their tails out at times; a thin, straight neck tapering into a small head, giving a "headless" impression; and a soaring, buteo-like flight with wings stretched out flat. At the time of these sightings none of the observers or M.O.R.C. members voting for the records felt that Double-crested Cormorant, the only similar species, could duplicate the shape and flight described. However, in September 1988, one of the observers saw a flock of about 30 cormorants flying over Hawk Ridge in Duluth: many had a tail which appeared the same as the neck-head length, and, more importantly, some of the birds clearly fanned their tails when circling overhead; some individuals held their necks out perfectly straight, with no characteristic cormorant "crook" in the neck, leaving an impression of neck, head and bill tapering to a point; and, when soaring, the cormorants' wings appeared long and flat. On the basis of this sighting, the observer withdrew his earlier Anhinga record, and the Committee felt that the other two records should similarly be found Unacceptable since Double-crested Cormorant was not precluded. 9735 North Shore Dr., Duluth, MN 55804



BOOK REVIEWS

ATLAS OF WINTERING NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS: An Analysis of Christmas Bird Count Data; by Terry Root, 1988. University of Chicago Press, Foreword by Chandler S. Robbins, 312 pages, 596 maps, soft-bound, \$35.00, hard-cover, \$60.00.

Have you ever wondered why — when it is ten degrees below zero and that bone-chilling Alberta Clipper cuts right through your Sorels, long underwear, wool pants and your

double-knit ski socks — you volunteered to participate in a Christmas Bird Count? If so, Terry Root's new book, *Atlas of Wintering North American Birds*, will help provide you with an answer. Ten years of Christmas Bird Count data (1963-1972) from 1282 count sites across the United States and southern Canada have been analyzed and summarized into accounts describing the winter distribution of 508 species. Unique contour and three-dimensional maps depicting both range and

96-45

February 5, 1997

Dear Tom,

Thanks for your recent letters about your Anhinga report and our Pygmy Nuthatch.

As far as the Anhinga goes, I would not accept it. I know Steve Dinsmore is a good observer, but note that he writes: "I have seen thousands of Double-crested Cormorants and I have never seen one soar in this manner." However, cormorants do soar up high on occasion, and when they do they look a lot like Anhingas -- as noted in the reference you cited (The Loon 61:12-13). Other birders and I had never noticed this until about ten years ago, and before then we were fooled by high flying cormorants a few times -- and I'd like to think we were at least as skilled and as careful as Steve Dinmore. I believe that unless the observer has had previous experience with such cormorants and can see and document some unambiguous and diagnostic feature on the bird, an out-of-range Anhinga report should not be accepted. In my opinion, everything Steve describes is consistent with a soaring cormorant -- presumably an immature because of the belly/upper breast contrast.

As for our Pygmy Nuthatch, most of us on MORC, myself included, agree with you and the Iowa records committee that the nuthatch should be accepted. And it was, with that qualifying "o" subscript. By the way, MORC does not seek guidance from the AOU on such matters -- this was an independent action by two of those who voted against the record and want it reconsidered. Most of us agree with you that the ABA is a better source of information -- and note that input from them was already sought and received prior to our meeting, and they said it should be accepted. But there is nothing wrong with also getting opinions from AOU contacts.

Also note that the "o" qualifier amounts to a compromise -- and I believe a good one -- since there was such a strong outcry from those opposed to the record, including the two dissenters on MORC. We rewrote the definition of the "o" category to include the nuthatch since some had reasonable doubts about it being a "natural occurrence". By doing so, we are not saying it's a possible escape like a caracara or whistling-duck.

I still think it's a very good idea to allow visitors to our meetings from the standpoint of public relations. Such openness tends to allay the fears of many birders who look on records committees as an elitist group operating in secret with no contact with the birding public.

Thanks again for your thoughts and support on the nuthatch. By the way, I also heard from 8 or 9 other state records committees as a whole or from individual members of them -- all agree it's a countable bird!

Kim Schert

96-45

13 November 1997

Tom Kent
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246

Tom-

The purpose of this letter is to address three records of birds in Iowa. First, I noticed that one of my Laughing Gull records (17 August 1996, record #96-56) is given a status of A-P. I assume the photo is the one I took on 5 September. If so, why are the two records being lumped? And why is the 5 September date not mentioned? I stated in my report that they were possibly the same bird, but given the regularity of this species in Iowa the last few years I think it would make more sense to treat them as separate records. I think there is much stronger evidence that the Pomarine Jaegers and Saylorville and Red Rock last fall involved some (all?) of the same birds, and those records are being treated separately.

A few comments regarding the other Laughing Gull record (10 May 1996, Saylorville). I would hope that those committee members who thought the bird was a Little Gull re-examine the photo. The entire underwing is not dark; only the undersides of the primaries. This is evident from the lack of contrast between the belly and the axillars and underwing coverts. This is not typical of adult Little Gull. However, because the record should be a part of the literature, I have enclosed a brief description of the bird for review. I hope that in the near future, only brief details (if any at all) would be required for Laughing Gulls during the expected period of occurrence.

Finally, I think my Anhinga record needs a little support. It appears the Iowa Records Committee is in effect saying that Anhingas cannot be identified in flight. I believe this is entirely incorrect. I stated that I have experience with both species in flight and that I recognized the bird immediately as an Anhinga. In my documentation, I stated, "I have seen thousands of Double-crested Cormorants and I have never seen one soar in this manner." I stand by this statement in its entirety. I never said that cormorants don't soar. They frequently do, but never match the appearance of this bird which included a thin, outstretched neck with a headless appearance and a long fanned tail clearly longer than the neck/head (see documentation). Do committee members understand that while behavioral characters and appearance can change depending on viewing conditions, weather, etc., structural characters are much less variable? The bird I described couldn't have been anything but an Anhinga. The flight behavior further supports the structural characters noted. I stated unequivocally that the neck was outstretched and that "the tail was noticeably longer than the neck..". Even a Double-crested Cormorant with the neck kinked will have a tail that is always shorter than the length of the neck. With the neck outstretched, the neck will always be longer than the length of the tail. This is due to the long-tailed nature of Anhingas. "In twelve specimens... average (tail) length was 24.4 centimeters (extremes: 21.5 and 26.0 centimeters). In nine cormorants ... tail length was 14.2 centimeters (extremes: 13.0 and 16.0 centimeters)." (Owre, O. T. 1967. Adaptations for locomotion and feeding in the Anhinga and the Double-crested Cormorant. Ornithological Monographs No. 6. The American Ornithologists' Union.). Owre (1967) further noted that tail length comprised 28.7% of the total length of an Anhinga but just 18.9% of that of a Double-crested Cormorant. I was unable to find similar measurements for neck length. I also searched unsuccessfully for a photo of a Double-crested Cormorant in flight showing a tail that was longer than the neck. Short of being a mutant Double-crested Cormorant that was missing a few neck vertebrae, the bird I described was an Anhinga. In my opinion, comments by the outside reviewer are basically worthless. This record should have been sent to a reviewer

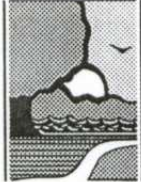
96-45

who is familiar with this species, not someone with limited experience who lives in Minnesota. Comments by the Minnesota records committee indicate that one of their records was later rejected when the original observer withdrew the record because of personal doubts. I note that their comments include the following: "a long tail about the same length as the head and neck". Also, they apparently never considered the possibility of a Double-crested Cormorant, something I did consider. I think it is a real shame that the IOU Records Committee takes skepticism to such ridiculous ends.

Finally, I noticed in the Records Committee report for 1996 that the Little Gull at Black Hawk Lake in April was a juvenile. Was this a mistake? Juvenal plumage in Little Gulls is lost by late fall, so a young bird in April can't be in juvenile plumage.

Sincerely,

ILLINOIS



DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL
RESOURCES

96-45
springfield
illinois illinois
state
museum

Research & Collections Center
1011 East Ash Street
Springfield, IL 62703
Telephone (217) 782-7475

7 January 1998

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52246

Dear Tom:

I can understand the split vote on the Anhinga from Lake Darling. I think Dinsmore has done a fairly good job on his write up. The only objection being he did not describe the shape of the tail and how it was different from a Cormorant's tail, other than that it was fanned. I also think he has a point that if this is rejected, how would an observer ever identify an Anhinga in flight? It is obviously done all the time, and Eckert's cautioning comments notwithstanding, I would vote for this record.

Dinsmore has had previous experience with both species and his description points to his identification of an Anhinga.

Sincerely,

H. David Bohlen, Assistant Curator of Zoology
Ornithology
Illinois State Museum
Research and Collections Center
1011 East Ash Street
Springfield, Illinois 62703-3535
Phone: 217-782-6697
email: bohlen@museum.state.il.us

3/4/78

96-45

Dear Chris,

This seems like an excellent description on an Anhinga. The style of soaring and the description of the silhouette all seem to fit. The only problem I might have is the failure to mention the pointed bill. This would certainly distinguish it from the "hooked" bill of the cormorants. The details that are given, though, seem to me to make up for this one short-coming.

I have seen Anhingas as far north as northwestern Tenn. (around Reelfoot Lake), and, although they are not common that far north, they do seem to follow the Miss. River well into the middle part of the country.

I am no expert on Anhingas, and if I don't spend much time around the Gulf Coast I may only see one or two in a year. They are such unusual birds, however, and do have an inclination to soar, that I find this a very believable report.

Sincerely, Ben Harmon

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources



Paul A. Sandifer, Ph.D.
Director

W. Brock Conrad, Jr.
Deputy Director for
**Wildlife and
Freshwater Fisheries**

Chris Edwards
85 Whitman Ave.
North Liberty, IA 52317

7 March 1998

Dear Chris,

It is my opinion that Mr. Dinsmore is correct with differentiating soaring Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorants. They are commonly referred to as "soaring crosses" around here, when commenting about differentiating the two species. Everything he indicates in his observation, tail length and description, wing shape, and neck description, etc., is a hundred percent Anhinga. The only thing I can not comment on is the wingbeat and that is all based on weather conditions anyway.

I hope this has been of some help to the committee. Anytime we can be of any help, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Lex Glover
PO Box 117
Lugoff, SC 29078

(803) 438-9855
bglvr@clemsn.edu

Date: Sun, 8 Mar 1998 13:40:46 -0600 (CST)
Mime-Version: 1.0
To: CREdwards@aol.com
From: Greg Lasley <glasley@onr.com>
Subject: Anhinga record

Dear Chris,

Thank you for allowing me to take a look at the written documentation on the sight report of an Anhinga in Washington Co., IA in 17 September 1996 (96-45).

Anhinga is a species I am very familiar with and have seen them often over the past 20 or so years all over the SE United States and parts of Mexico. I occasionally see them in large migration flights (up to 300 or so birds) in the fall. They are permanent residents in Texas.

I have read the documentation submitted by Mr. Dinsmore several times, and I have to say I find it very convincing. I'll point out the things in his report which lead me to the conclusion that he is correct in his ID. I do not know Mr. Dinsmore.

1. I agree that few species would be mistaken for an Anhinga, and even a cormorant is a stretch. I can recognize a soaring Anhinga at a very long distance due to its distinctive body shape in flight which is as Dinsmore describes; long tail, long pointed wings, and very skinny neck which seems to lack an obvious head. The tail is really long-looking in flight, and here in Texas we sometimes describe them as "flying crosses." The shallow wing beats as described are also good and wrong for cormorants. I have never seen cormorants of any species soar in such a manner.

2. In September I often see Anhingas mixed in with migrating Broad-winged Hawks. While I have no idea why a fall Anhinga would be in Iowa, the behavior is consistent with that which is seen here. I've never seen a cormorant do this. The species often disperses up into central and north Texas in small numbers in the late summer...perhaps this one went too far and was on its way back south?

3. The description of the leading edge of the wings being held straight and perpendicular to the body also matches my experience with the species. All in all, the bird is VERY distinctive in flight and once seen it is hard to mistake it for anything else.

The observer apparently has experience with the species and I have to say his description reads very good to me. I just do not have any problems with it. I think he had an Anhinga. I see nothing in the report to make me feel otherwise.

Hope this helps a little.

Sincerely,

Greg Lasley
Secretary, Texas Bird Records Committee
(Visit the TBRC at <http://members.tripod.com/~tbrc/>)
Editor, Texas Region, ABA/Audubon Field Notes
305 Loganberry Ct., Austin, TX 78745-6527
Telephone: (512) 441-9686
email: glasley@onr.com

96-45

Louisiana Bird Records Committee

Museum of Natural Science 119 Foster Hall Baton Rouge, LA 70803
504-388-2855

9 March 1998

Dear Chris:

I have reviewed the record, IOURC #96-45 of an Anhinga reported 17 September 1996 from Lake Darling S. P. The description by the observer is good, especially noting the 1) "pencil thin neck...and lacked an obvious head"; 2) "very long tail...fanned as the bird soared"; and 3) "occasionally gave a couple of shallow wing beats". The observer could make out that the bird had two-toned underparts, a feature not shared by other similar species. Also, the description seems fairly honest for an observation of a distant bird. I would describe the shape of an Anhinga basically the same way as the observer. The shape of a soaring Anhinga is completely unlike that of a cormorant. At a great distance the head and neck are barely visible and Anhingas look more like a raptor than a cormorant. I don't think anyone with *any* experience with either Anhinga or cormorants would mistake the two.

Anhingas often join flocks of other soaring birds during migration. I have seen them join kettles of Broad-winged Hawks, as well as flocks of White Pelicans, Wood Storks, etc. The date of the observation is well within the time period I would expect to encounter a southbound migrant in Louisiana. The observer's description of the bird's shape, size, plumage, and flight behavior supports the identification of Anhinga. Unless, the observer is known or suspected to be unreliable, I see no reason not to accept the record.

best wishes,



Donna L. Dittmann
Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee
Member, ABA Checklist Committee
email: ddittma@unix1.sncc.lsu.edu

96-45

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Anhinga
Number: 1 female or immature
Location: Lake Darling S.P., Washington Co.
Habitat: soaring high over lake
Date: 17 September 1996
Time: 4:42-4:50 p.m.
Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50014
Others who saw bird: none

Description of bird(s): I was walking along the east shore of the lake when I noticed that several Broad-winged Hawks were kettling overhead. Every minute or two I glanced up, until the kettle contained 9 birds. When I next glanced up, I saw another single bird which I initially assumed would be another hawk. When I put my binoculars on it, I noted the long, fairly broad, pointed wings, long, skinny neck, and very long tail. Within a couple of seconds, I recognized the silhouette as that of an Anhinga. Because of the great distance, I was not able to see many details of the bird's plumage. However, there was a line of contrast on the breast, separating the birds' dark belly from a paler neck and upper breast. Throughout the observation, the bird soared lazily towards the southwest, eventually joining the kettle of Broad-winged Hawks. While soaring, the bird occasionally gave a couple of shallow wingbeats. The birds' silhouette was distinctive. The skinny, almost pencil-thin neck was held straight in front of the bird, and lacked an obvious head. The tail was noticeably longer than the length of the neck and was fanned as the bird soared. The leading edges of the wings were straight and held perpendicular to the body. The only size comparison was with Broad-winged Hawks. This bird was clearly much larger, roughly twice the length (head to tail) of the hawks. This birds wingspan was also at least 50% greater. The identification was based largely on this flight silhouette. I concluded the bird was a female or immature because of the paler neck and upper breast.

Similar species and how eliminated: Cormorants are the only birds likely to be confused with an Anhinga. I have seen thousands of Double-crested Cormorants and I have never seen one soar in this manner. Also, a Double-crested Cormorant has a neck which is always longer than the tail (in flight) and looks conspicuously large-headed and thick-necked when seen overhead. Neotropic Cormorant is much smaller and, although it is longer-tailed than a Double-crested, the tail is still shorter than the neck in flight.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were fair-the bird was soaring directly overhead against lighter-colored clouds. Estimated viewing distance was 500m. I used 10x42 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen dozens of Anhingas, mostly in North Carolina. I am also very familiar with the similar-looking Double-crested and Neotropic cormorants, the most likely species for confusion.

References consulted: none

How long before field notes made: written immediately after observation
How long before this form completed: written 19 September 1996