

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/22/00

Brown Pelican

4 Nov 1996

Lock and Dam 18, Des Moines Co., IA

*Jim Fuller

IBL 67:19, 81; Fuller 1997, Kleen 1997

Record Number: 96-43

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240 [4/6/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:19

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

Fuller, J. 1997. Brown Pelican in Des Moines County. IBL
67:91.

Kleen, V. M. 1997. WOW! What a day! Meadowlark 6:45-46.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Although this unmistakable bird was seen by many, only
one documentation was received and its last date was unconfirmed.

The good news was that I thought these birds could be Red Knots. The bad news, was that my spotting scope was locked in my Jeep in an auto-repair shop 25 miles away! After a nerve-racking stop-and-go stalk down a dike, I was finally able to view the birds from about 30 yards away.

The two birds were larger than adjacent Pectoral Sandpipers, about the same size as Killdeer, but they looked fatter with shorter legs. They had straight, black bills about the same length as their heads. One bird was pale gray above and white below with a pale superciliary line. I couldn't see any subterminal feather markings from this distance with binoculars. The other bird was brownish on the back with no eyeline and a pale rusty "robin-red" below. The bird appeared to be molting to basic plumage as its face was grayish and the belly color was mottled.

Once, as the knots flew briefly, I saw a paler rump on the gray bird and a narrow white wing stripe along the base of the primaries and secondaries. They made calls in flight unlike those that I am familiar with.

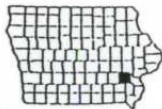
Later, I called the Birdline, but no one else got to see the knots. A strong cold front with thunderstorms that night triggered their departure. These were the first Red Knots at Union Slough since one (also molting from alternate plumage) on 31 August 1989, and about the fifteenth fall record from Iowa.

709 North Phillips, Algona, IA 50511

BLACK-NECKED STILTS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 18 May 1996, Beth Proescholdt, Russ Widner, and I were heading to the spring I.O.U. meeting at Burlington and watching flooded farm fields for shorebirds. In Washington County, just south of highway 92 along highway 218, we saw a large shorebird in a flooded creek valley. We stopped, and were surprised and delighted to see three Black-necked Stilts in the field.



These large, distinctive, slim-bodied shorebirds were black on the head, back of neck, back, and wings. They were white on the underside of the body—the chin, sides of the neck, belly, and undertail coverts. They had very long, bright pink legs and a long, straight black bill. Two of the stilts had dark brown backs while one had a very black back. The National Geographic field guide states that the females are browner above.



Black-necked Stilt near Ainsworth, 18 May 1996. Photo by Thomas H. Kent

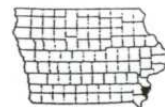
Many people saw them on 19 May while at the spring I.O.U. meeting. According to *Birds in Iowa* (Kent and Dinsmore, 1996), this sighting is one of six recent well-substantiated records with five records from the spring and one from the fall.

P. O. Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148

BROWN PELICAN IN DES MOINES COUNTY

JIM FULLER

On 1 November 1996 Chuck Fuller was amazed to see a Brown Pelican fly from below Lock and Dam #18 on the Mississippi River north of Burlington. The only access to this area is from the Illinois side of the river, and I was there shortly after sunrise the morning of 4 November. I immediately located a Brown Pelican close to the Illinois shore just below the lock. During the next 20 minutes, I watched the bird as it drifted downstream about 300-400 yards until it was in the middle of the river. Since the main navigation channel at this location is through the lock along the Illinois shore, most of the river here is considered to be in Iowa.



There were also American White Pelicans in the vicinity and, in comparison, the Brown Pelican appeared to be 20 percent smaller. This was generally a drab, dull brown and gray bird with an enormous bill. The back and wing were a dull brown with light mottling. The back of the neck, head, and crown were also brown. The underparts, including the front of the neck, were a light gray mottled color. From these features I concluded that this was the plumage of a juvenile bird. The neck was very long, and the eye was dark. The light gray bill, which was huge both in width and length, appeared rounded on the end. The bird kept the bill tucked against its breast. The tail was short and brown. I never did see the bird fly, and it was silent during the viewing period.

Brown Pelican is a resident of salt water habitats from the mid-Atlantic to the Gulf states as well as the Pacific coast of California. Vagrancy inland, particularly in the spring, and to Midwestern states is well documented. There are seven previous Iowa records for Brown Pelican, only one of which occurred in the fall, but that October sighting was also from the Mississippi River in Lee County. There are five spring (March-May) records and one summer record from July. All of these sightings were from the southern half of the state.

6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

IN MEMORIAM: PHILIP A. DUMONT

On 12 February 1996, Philip DuMont passed away in Chapel Hill, Carolina. He had been a member of the I.O.U. since 1924 and at the time of his death, had been a member of the organization longer than any other member. Phil was born on 9 July 1903 in Rochester, Minnesota but his family soon moved to Davenport and then Des Moines where he attended high school. He completed a B.S. degree in Biology at Drake University in 1926. In 1927 he joined the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where we worked in the bird department until 1931. During that time he spent 16 months in Madagascar studying birds as part of a museum expedition.

In 1931, he returned to Iowa and completed his manuscript on *Birds of Polk County Iowa* which was published in 1931. He spent part of 1932 attending the University of California at Berkeley but returned to Iowa that fall and worked on the bird collection at the University of Iowa. That project expanded into a monograph, A revised list of the *Birds of Iowa* which was published in *University of Iowa Studies in Natural History* (volume 15, number 5, 1933). This is the second complete survey

WOW! What A Day!

One of Illinois' best birders
adds three new state species to his list in a single day!

By Vernon M. Kleen

Thursday, 7 November 1996, was to be a day of field observations along the Mississippi River below the Quad Cities, however, a phone call early Wednesday was challenging enough to modify the schedule.

The call came from Michelle Simone, the Department of Natural Resource's District 5 Heritage Biologist in the Pekin office. Simone had just heard from Mrs. Viola Gronewold of Trivoli (in western Peoria County) who wanted to know if she should continue feeding the hummingbird that was still coming to her feeder. Gronewold knew that hummingbirds should have migrated south by November and was concerned that her feeding had kept this bird from doing what it was supposed to do. Temperatures had already dipped into the low 20s a few days earlier, so, why was this hummingbird still here?

Knowing that hummingbirds in late fall may be species other than the traditional Ruby-throated, I called Gronewold and recommended she continue feeding the bird as long as it stayed—no matter how cold it got. Of course, I also asked if several of us could stop by very early the next morning to determine if she had an unusual hummingbird. Gronewold graciously agreed, giving excellent directions to her home as well as offering advice on how we could best see the feeder near the window on the back patio.

H. David Bohlen and Myrna Deaton, co-members of the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee,

agreed to meet me at Williamsville at 6 a.m. Dan Kassebaum from Belleville also joined us.

It was 35 degrees and drizzling. The weather forecast for the rest of the day was gloomy - certainly not an ideal birding day. But we were on a mission.

Perhaps it was luck (Luck Number 1), that as we reached Peoria shortly after 7 a.m., the drizzle stopped never to return that day. We arrived at the Gronewold house about 7:30 a.m. and set up scopes on the southwest side. In just 15 minutes the hummingbird appeared. It was drab and different from what any of us had anticipated. Several features eliminated Ruby-throated as well as other projected possibilities such as Rufous Hummingbird.

Even though the bird sat still at close range for considerable time, it was difficult to pin down exact plumage and other details, so, we got Gronewold's permission to set up a mist net to capture the bird, and, called Louise Augustine (who was expecting our call) to join us with more detailed hummingbird information.

The net, where originally placed, was quite visible and the hummingbird went around and over it several times. We moved the net so that it stretched directly across the patio in front of the feeder. The hummingbird hovered in front of the net, moved to one side and finally flew into it (Luck Number 2). We quickly and carefully retrieved the hummingbird

from the net, took several measurements, photographed the bird, and collected one outer tail feather. On close-up evaluation we presumed the bird to be a female Broad-billed Hummingbird (a first Illinois record), then, solidified our decision with the support literature Augustine provided.

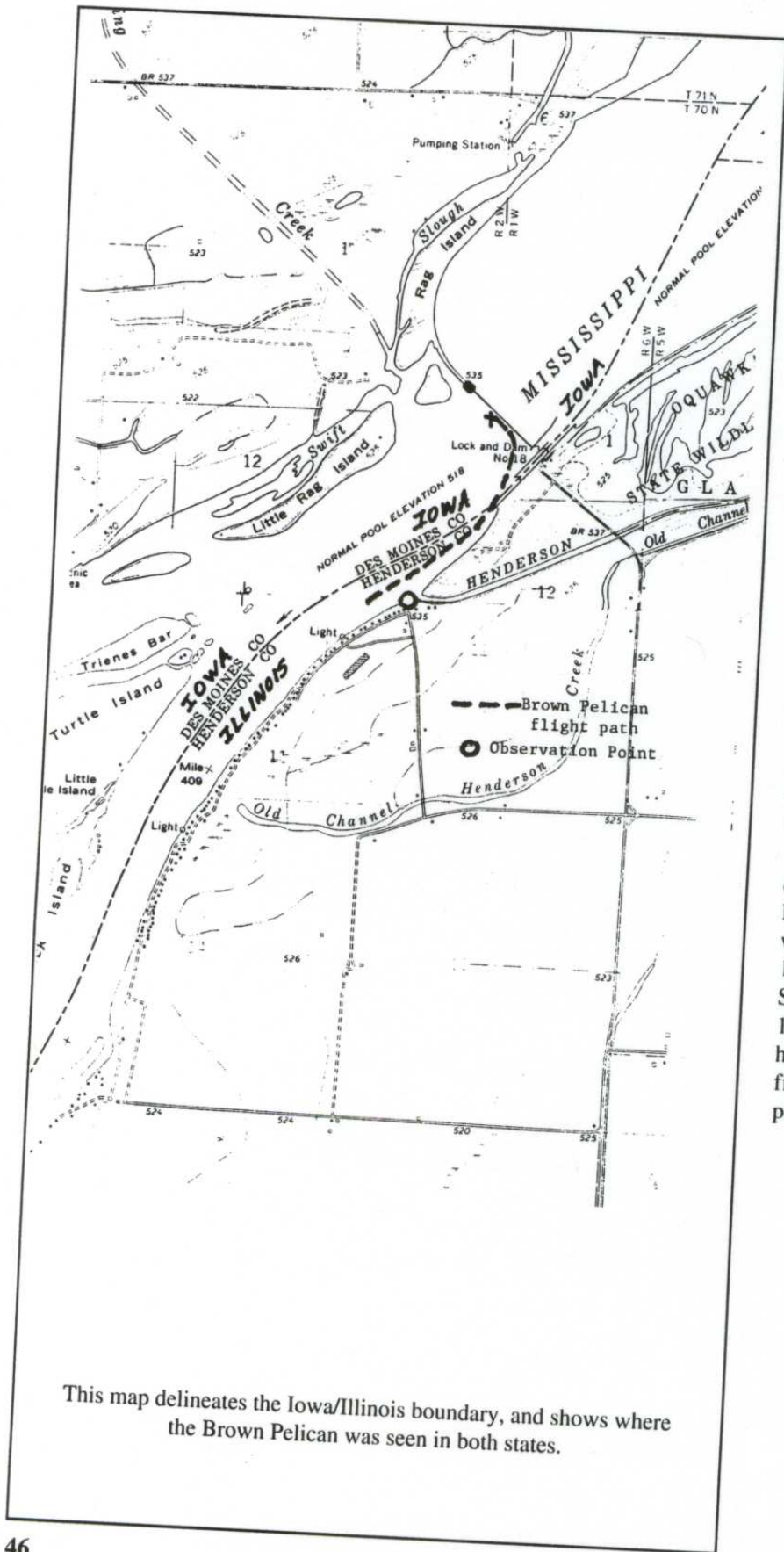
On pronouncement to Mrs. Gronewold that she was feeding a bird that had not been previously reported in Illinois and that a hundred or more birders from all over the state would like to see it, we asked her if she would have any problems continuing to feed the bird and "entertaining" a large number of visitors. Once again, she was a gracious hostess and agreed as long as the visitors did not block her driveway. As we departed about 10 a.m., Augustine, with Tom Pucelik, released the bird.

WOW! What a Day!

However, it was only beginning...

From Trivoli we headed to Lock & Dam 18 on the Mississippi River near Gladstone. We had heard that a Brown Pelican was there earlier in the week. We arrived about 11:30 a.m. and searched for the bird for an hour. We did see a Common Loon, an American White Pelican, and a Black Scoter below the dam, and 60 American White Pelicans, a Western Grebe, and lots of diving ducks above the dam. But no Brown Pelican.

We then realized that, on review of the state boundary lines, that **everything present** both above and below the Dam was **exclusively** in Iowa.



This map delineates the Iowa/Illinois boundary, and shows where the Brown Pelican was seen in both states.

and, therefore, we (nor anyone else) could count (with conscience) any of those birds for Illinois (see map). It's a good thing for us the Brown Pelican wasn't at the Lock & Dam at that time (Luck Number 3). Having failed there, we left about 12:30 p.m. and found another access to the river and a Cattle Egret about a mile down river from the dam. Luck Number 4 arrived - the Brown Pelican flew up river, directly in front of us (in Illinois), and continued up to the Lock & Dam (in Iowa) and settled on the river (in Iowa). From this same vantage point we also relocated the Black Scoter, which was definitely in the Illinois portion of the river (Luck Number 5).

We finally left the Gladstone area around 1:30 p.m. after I had added my third new state species in one day (the Black Scoter had remained elusive all these years); not bad when I consider it successful to add just one new species per year. Deaton and Kassebaum added two new species to their state lists.

We still had several hours of daylight left and we couldn't go by Lake Chautauqua Wildlife Refuge without stopping. Here we found 150 more white pelicans, 7 Tundra Swans, an American Avocet, and 150 Common Snipe amongst the hundreds of ducks, before the sun finally went down leaving us to ponder the incredible day.

— Vernon M. Kleen
R.R. #2, Box 481
Athens, IL 62613

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

96-43

SPECIES: Brown Pelican (Juvenile)

LOCATION: Lock & Dam #18 Mississippi River (Des Moines County)

DATE & TIME: 4 November, 1996 (6:42-7:05 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller. 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: Chuck Fuller found bird on 1 November. Seen later by Bernie and Cal Knight, Jim Scheib, John Rutenbeck, Myrna Deaton

BACKGROUND: Chuck Fuller called on 1 November reporting a Brown Pelican he had seen below the dam at Lock & Dam #18 about 1:15 PM. I was there early the morning of 4 November, and immediately spotted a Brown Pelican close to the Illinois shore just below the lock. During the next 20 minutes, the bird drifted downstream about 300-400 yards and was in approximately the middle of the river. Since the main navigation channel of the river at this location is through the lock along the Illinois shore, most of the river here is in Iowa.

DESCRIPTION: This was a large dull brown and gray bird with an enormous bill. There were White Pelicans in the area, and it appeared to be generally smaller in comparison. The back and wing were a dull brown with light mottling. The back of the neck, head and crown were also brown. The underparts, including the front of the neck were a light gray mottled color. The neck was very long, and the eye was dark. The bill was enormous, both in width and length, appeared rounded on the end, and was a light gray color. The bird kept the bill tucked in against its breast. The tail was very short and also a brown color. I never did see the bird fly or stand, and the legs were not seen. No vocalization was heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The White Pelican is white with yellow-orange or orange bill.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: It was early morning on a partly cloudy day, and I was viewing toward the southwest at distances ranging from 50 to 300-400 yards. Optics were Swift Audubon (8.5 X 44) binoculars and KOWA TSN4 telescope (20-60X zoom).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen one bird previously in Iowa, but also on numerous occasions along the gulf, Atlantic, and southern Pacific coasts.

FIELD GUIDES & FIELD NOTES: Field notes made in the car after sighting. No field guide was checked until the same evening, and this form was typed 11 November.