

Magnificent Frigatebird
25 Sep 1988
Clear L., Cerro Gordo Co., IA
*Walter *****
to 26 Sep; IBL 59(2),9,76, AB 43:109, Kent 1989

Record Number: 88-11
Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jan L. Walter, 25 Sep
Steve Dinsmore, 25 Sep
Jim Dinsmore, 25 Sep
Beth Proescholdt, 25 Sep
Mark Proescholdt, 25 Sep
Peter C. Petersen, 25 Sep
Jim Fuller, 26 Sep
Thomas H. Kent, 26 Sep
Mike Thomas, 26 Sep

PHOTOGRAPHS

Alan W. Hancock, 25 Sep, P-0262 (IBL 59:57; 59(2) cover)
T. H. Kent, 26 Sep, P-0263 (IBL 59:57, AB 43:109)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:9
Photograph: IBL 59(2) cover (P-0262), IBL 59:57 (P-0262,
0263); Am. Birds 43:109
Records Committee: IBL 59:76
Kent, T. H. 1989. Magnificent Frigatebirds in Iowa. IBL
59:56-62.

VOTE: 5-A-P, 1-A-D, 1-NA

A-P. Unmistakeable. Descriptions and photo clearly indicate female frigatebird.

A-P. Good set of documentations which all mention same descriptions from observers at different times and dates. With photo there is no doubt about this record.

NA. Frigatebird sp. A-P. Photo is clearly of a female frigatebird. While likelihood is overwhelming that this bird was a Magnificent, I am surprised no one commented on or attempted to see the axillaries, which would confirm Magnificent vs. Great. The hurricane which presumably brought this bird to Iowa travelled as a very strong storm a great distance, partly within the Atlantic range of Great Frigatebird. There is indeed a Great Frigatebird specimen from Oklahoma. Only Petersen even mentioned possibility of Great, but dismissed it on distributional grounds (incorrectly!).

REVOTE: 3-A-P, 3-A-D, 1-NA

A-D. Point raised is valuable: we should always consider all possibilities.

A-D. Fuller mentions white marks extending a short distance onto the underwing which eliminates Great Frigatebird. Range to me eliminates others.

NA. Vote A-P for frigatebird sp. I cannot conclusively identify this bird to species from descriptions provided.

A-P. I agree with NA comments, but it is a matter of taste. Iowa would look silly with F. sp. on list while all other states show Magnificent.

A-P. Photo taken by Kent is that of a female Magnificent Frigatebird because of placement and shape of white on breast (faint but distinguishable). Therefore other frigatebird species eliminated for this record. See Harrison, Seabirds and Identification Guide, page 312.

A-P. Re: comment on Lesser and Great Frigatebird--the records mentioned constitute the only North American records for two species. Surely we don't need to consider such extremely remote possibilities.

A-D. I have serious questions about our consistency--we vote Rufous Hummingbird to Salaphorus sp. because of possible Allen's, but are not willing to do this with frigatebirds. There is just as much if not more evidence of other (unlikely) possibilities with Mag. Frigatebird as for Rufous Hummingbird.

SEND TO: Jan L. Walter, 934 13th St. SE, Mason City, IA 50401

Beth & Mark Prescholdt, Box 65, Loscomb, IA

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA

Mike Thomas, 2517 47th St., Des Moines, IA 50310

The rains finally came in August, too late to be of value for nesting birds and not enough to fill marshes and ponds desiccated by the summer's drought. Hurricane Gilbert brought badly needed moisture to some areas in September, but rainfall remained spotty through October. Only November was accompanied by above-normal precipitation in every state. Temperatures remained unusually hot during August but returned to normal or below-normal averages in other months. As the season ended, most areas were no longer experiencing drought conditions although complete recovery may require at least a year of above-normal precipitation.

Perhaps as a result of the drought, the songbird migration was exceptionally early. The largest warbler flights were mostly prior to September 10, and even the later migrants had largely passed through the Region by late October. Shorebirds also migrated early although stragglers were detected in several areas. While a few ducks appeared very early, the majority of the waterbird migration was on time.

In general, the fall migration was not impressive. The expected species were detected, but with few exceptions numbers were relatively low and detectable flights were very locally distributed. However, an exceptional variety of rarities partially compensated for the lackluster movements of expected species.

Unfortunately, the Illinois report was not received in time to be incorporated in this seasonal summary. Except for the observations of a few individuals, the following summary contains no information from Illinois.

ABBREVIATIONS — Say. Res. = Saylorville Res., IA; U.S.W.R. = Union Slough Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, IA; O.W.R. = Ottawa Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, OH; S.L.W.R. = Swan Lake Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, MO. Place names in *italics* are counties.

LOONS TO FRIGATEBIRDS — A normal Red-throated Loon flight was composed of reports from 3 L. Erie locations with a total of three on L. Michigan and inland singles at



Red-throated Loon at Headlands State Park, Ohio, November 30, 1988. Photograph/Tom LePage.

Gibson, IN, Oct. 19 (DJ, GBo) and Say. Res. Nov. 16 (†SD, †MP *et al.*). A casual fall visitor to Iowa, the only Pacific Loon was documented at Lake Manawa S.P. Oct. 23–28 (†B & †JP *et al.*). The earliest Com. Loon returned to L. Michigan Sept. 10. Their fall flights were heaviest along the Great Lakes with maxima of 952 near Michigan City, IN, Nov. 19 (DW *et al.*) and 250 at Cleveland Nov. 21 (†J & †DH). The largest inland flocks totaled 46–81.

Pied-billed Grebes were relatively scarce with no more than 35–52 reported from any state. Horned Grebes appeared in fair numbers, peaking with 300 in Gibson, IN, Nov. 20 (DJ, GBo); 161 in w. Kentucky Nov. 13 (BP); and flocks of 50–110 along the Great Lakes. A juv. Red-necked Grebe in Cerro Gordo, IA, Aug. 4 was exceptionally early (†J & †JW), but 4 reports from the Great Lakes and another from Iowa indicated a typical fall flight. The earliest Eared Grebe returned to Iowa Aug. 26, and expected numbers elsewhere included 5 sightings in Ohio and one in Indiana. Western Grebes were restricted to the w. states with a maximum of four at Say. Res. and singles at 2 w. Missouri lakes.

A casual visitor to L. Erie, an imm. N. Gannet was observed at Huron Nov. 11–19 (†m.ob.). Impressive numbers of Am. White Pelicans passed through Iowa, where as many as 6000+ were estimated at Say. Res. Sept. 15–Oct. 1, and flocks of 300–

S.A.

In addition to bringing some badly needed rain, Hurricane Gilbert also scattered **Magnificent Frigatebirds** across several states. Iowa's first confirmed record was provided by an ad. female observed at Clear L. Sept. 25–26 (†J & †JW, m.ob.). This same female may have briefly visited Red Rock Res., IA, Oct. 2 (†DDe), where an ad. male was observed Oct. 3 (†DY, GB). An ad. female photographed at Longview L. Sept. 27–28 (†CH, m.ob.) established the first unequivocal record for Missouri. Along L. Michigan at Michigan City an imm. frigatebird Sept. 30 (†LH *et al.*) and an ad. male Oct. 4 (†KB) provided Indiana's first sightings since 1957.



Female Magnificent Frigatebird at Clear Lake, Iowa, September 26, 1988. Photograph/T. H. Kent.

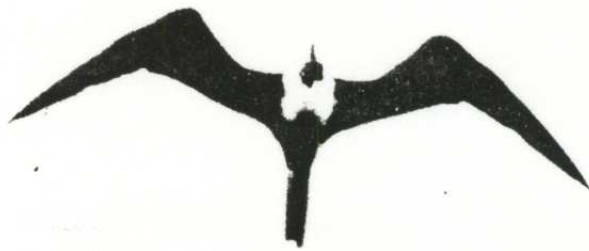


Magnificent Frigatebird over Michigan City Harbor, Indiana, September 30, 1988. Photograph/Ken Brock.

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IOWA BIRD LIFE

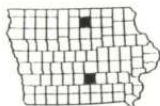
Spring 1989 Volume 59 Number 2



IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRDS IN IOWA

THOMAS H. KENT



Frigatebirds are large, long-winged seabirds found mainly in tropical waters. In proportion to their wingspan they are the lightest weight of any group of birds. This accounts for their extreme agility in the air, allowing them to feed by harassing other fish-eating seabirds or to pick fish from the surface of the water. They cannot swim or walk. On the Dry Tortugas I watched a frigatebird outmaneuver a Forster's Tern, forcing it to drop its fish and catching the fish before it hit the water.

Frigatebirds are sexually dimorphic and also have an immature plumage that lasts for four to six years. The five species of frigatebird have many similarities and are said to be among the most difficult birds to identify at sea (Harrison 1983). Two species have a rather local distribution: Ascension Frigatebird in equatorial mid-Atlantic ocean and Christmas Frigatebird in the East Indies. Great Frigatebird and Lesser Frigatebird are the most widespread, inhabiting tropical waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and a small area of the Atlantic Ocean off of southern Brazil. The Great Frigatebird's range reaches the eastern Pacific Ocean; the Lesser's does not. Magnificent Frigatebird, the only species whose range reaches North America, is found from northern Argentina north to Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico, from Ecuador to California, and off the extreme west coast of Africa.

There are many records of frigatebirds across North America, many of them following hurricanes. Most of the records are presumed to be of Magnificent Frigatebird, but Great and Lesser frigatebirds have each been recorded once. As Hurricane Gilbert reached the coast of northern Mexico in September 1988, I predicted that it would be a good time to look for them in Iowa. This thought was enhanced when I watched the news and heard that pilots flying into the eye of the hurricane saw thousands of birds circling. Frigatebirds, unlike other seabirds, cannot land in the water without perishing, and their light weight makes them susceptible to being blown far off course.

I did not act on my hunch, but fortunately others were out and found them in Iowa and most nearby states. This article will summarize the documentations of three frigatebirds found in Iowa, briefly discuss identification problems, mention previous unaccepted records for Iowa, and review vagrancy patterns in North America.

FALL 1988 FRIGATEBIRDS IN IOWA

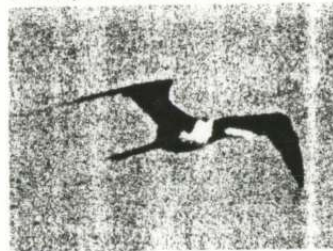
A female frigatebird was found over Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County and word of the sighting was passed to birders around the state by Curt Nelson and others. The first documentor was Jan Walter who saw the bird briefly at 9:40 a.m. on 25 September 1988 and much closer at 11:20 a.m. She noted the following:

Much larger than Turkey Vulture, with extremely long, narrow wings, inward curve on leading edge of inner wing, sharply swept back at wrist, and pointed at tips. Long tail was deeply forked with forks squared off at tips. Long gray bill was sharply hooked at tip. Bird was all black except for a white breast in a V and the black of the belly extending forward into the breast in a less distinct V. The bird slowly circled above us about 15-20 feet above

tree top level, at one time directly overhead as we stood in the middle of the street. It was silent.

Alan W. Hancock photographed the bird at close range (cover). Between 4:00 and 6:10 p.m. on the 25th several documentors (Steve Dinsmore, Jim Dinsmore, Beth Proescholdt, Mark Proescholdt, Peter Petersen) saw the bird gliding high over the lake, sometimes with Franklin's Gulls. Later that evening Francis Moore (personal communication) saw the frigatebird land in a tree on a small island on the south shore of the lake.

The bird was next seen from 7:10 a.m. intermittently to mid-morning on 26 September by the author and Jim Fuller as it glided over the north shore into a strong south wind. We saw that the ragged tail feathers sometimes showed three forks (photo). Fuller also noted, "The red (pinkish red) feet could be seen tucked up against body on one occasion at close range." He also noted, "There was a white band which started at the neck and ended at mid-wing. There also were subtle white marks which extended a short distance onto the underwing from the white area." Mike Thomas also documented his sighting of the bird from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. on the 26th. The bird was seen later by others, but the last time it was seen is not recorded.

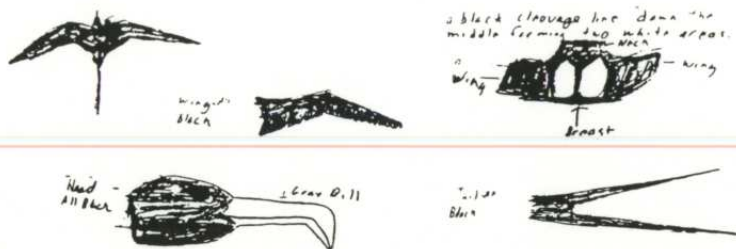


Female Magnificent Frigatebird at Clear Lake. Photos by Alan W. Hancock (left) and T. H. Kent (right).

A female frigatebird was documented by Dawn L. DeVore at Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County, on 2 October 1988. She saw the bird at about 20 yards by naked eye through her office window at the Visitors Center from 12:45 to 12:50 p.m. and recorded the following description:

The "body was large and black", yet streamlined and slender, the wingspan being as big if not bigger than a Turkey Vulture's. The wings themselves were black, narrow, long, and "bent at the elbows". The tail was V shaped, "black and slender"; like a long Barn Swallow's tail. (Body of bird too big to be a barn swallow.) Sometimes the bird did hold the V closed as it glided in the air currents. The closed V reminded me of a long black ribbon. The head was all black and very streamlined except for the strangest looking bill. The "head seemed smaller" but in proportion with the body. It was black with black eyes with a long slender "gray bill" that had an almost "squared turned down tip". There was no red on the underside of the head. The neck seemed to flow from the head into the body; it was proportional in size to the head and the body. The neck also had no red on it. The back and belly were also black. The breast, however, had white on it. These "white areas" were located just below the neck and just "inside of the shoulder" joints on the breast area itself. There were two areas, not one complete band of white. In fact you could say the normal white area on a frigatebird had a black cleavage line down the middle forming areas side by side. I could not see the legs or feet. The bird was "gliding along in the wind" along the bank of the lake. Then with all my mental notes and the bird out of sight, I ran for a bird book.

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Female Magnificent Frigatebird, Red Rock Reservoir, 2 October 1988. Drawings by Dawn L. DeVore.

A male frigatebird was documented by David Youngblut at Red Rock Reservoir, Marion County, from 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. on 3 October 1988. He saw the bird overhead as close as 35 feet and with binoculars and recorded the following description:

Large uniformly dark bird. Long somewhat hooked bill. Wings were long, slender and pointed. The wings were also bent at the elbows much like an Osprey. The tail was long and forked. It was held in the forked position and also held straight. The throat was dark with a reddish patch visible at close range. Underparts all uniformly dark. Feet and legs small, dark, and not real noticeable. I watch this bird for one-half hour. I never once saw the bird flap a wing. The bird came up over the dam and moved to the north side of the lake. It sailed along that side of the lake and would occasionally circle. I moved to the marina in hopes to get a better look and was fortunate enough to watch the bird directly overhead.

These Iowa records occurred more than a week after Hurricane Gilbert, the most severe hurricane ever in the Gulf of Mexico, hit the east coast of northern Mexico on 16 September 1988. Once inland, the storm curved north and produced northeasterly air flow into the Midwest until 23 September. There were many other frigatebird sightings in the Midwest, but details are not available at this writing.

IDENTIFICATION OF FRIGATEBIRDS

Recognition of a bird as a frigatebird is relatively easy, even for birders with little or no experience. The size, wing shape, gliding, forked tail, hooded bill, and dark color are evident at a great distance. Distinguishing male, female, and immature plumages of Magnificent Frigatebird is also easy at closer range. Males are all black except for the red throat, which can be seen when at close range. Females have a black head with white breast. Juveniles and immatures have white on the head, which progresses to brown and black as the bird matures. The amount of white on the breast and belly progressively decreases with age.

The male bird at Red Rock Reservoir was not a Lesser Frigatebird, because male Lesser Frigatebirds have a white flank patch that extends into the axillaries. Male Great Frigatebirds have a sandy-brown upperwing bar, but this

is absent in some populations and may be present on some Magnificents. Harrison (1986) says "Field identification of adult males on basis of present knowledge thus appears impossible, although legs/feet of Great Frigatebird usually brighter, more red."

White tipped axillaries forming three or four wavy lines are found in most stages of Magnificent Frigatebird, but not in adult males. Female Great Frigatebirds lack axillary marks and have a gray-white throat and sandy-brown upperwing bar. Female Lesser Frigatebirds have a white upper wing bar and white extensions from the belly into the axillaries. The pattern of white on the throat, breast, and axillaries of the female frigatebird at Clear Lake as shown in the photographs appears to clearly eliminate Great and Lesser frigatebirds. The subtle white marks on the underwing noted by Fuller and the failure of any of the observers to mention an upperwing bar also support the identification of Magnificent Frigatebird. The drawings of the female frigatebird at Red Rock Reservoir show a white pattern that fits Magnificent (dark throat, no axillary extension).

The North American record of Lesser Frigatebird was of a male at Deer Isle, Maine, on 3 July 1960 identified from movie film by the white flank patch. The Great Frigatebird record was from Oklahoma on 7 November 1975, but I found no published account of this bird, which is listed by the American Ornithologists' Union Checklist, but not in the American Birding Association Checklist.

OLD IOWA RECORDS

The first mention of a frigatebird in Iowa is only a brief note (Peck 1896):

During the discussion which followed the reading of the paper, Mr. Morton E. Peck reported the occurrence of the Ring-billed Gull and the Man-o-War Bird at LaPorte, his home place. Mention was made also of the Least Tern, the species having been seen in Winnebago county.

DuMont (1933) adding the following information regarding this record, "Relative to the above observation, Morton E. Peck on October 12, 1932, wrote that the specimen was not taken, but that the bird observed could hardly have been anything but this species."

Anderson (1907) reported, "...Dr. Paul Bartsch told me of a specimen taken near Burlington, Iowa, by a gunner in the latter part of September, 1903, but as it was not known whether obtained on the Iowa or Illinois side of the Mississippi River, the latter may hardly be considered as an official Iowa record."

Paul Bartsch, a noted scientist and early Iowa ornithologist, published a belated note (Bartsch 1922) on a mounted frigatebird he had seen 19 years earlier, which said:

In going over some old journals recently, I found a note that should have been recorded long ago. On a visit to the Lone Tree Club, near Gladstone, Illinois, on October 10, 1903, I saw a mounted specimen of a Man-o-war-bird. Inquiry revealed that the bird had been found in an exhausted condition on the Iowa bluffs of the Mississippi, immediately south of Burlington, in August of the same year, and that although it had been fed, they had succeeded in keeping it alive for a few days only. I believe this is the first Iowa record for the Man-o-war-bird (*Fregata magnificens rothschildi*).

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Years later photographs of the specimen were found in Bartsch's collection (Briggs 1969). The photographs show a female frigatebird with dark head and throat, white breast, and pale wing bar.

In another belated report, Coale (1910) described a mounted frigatebird he had seen six years earlier:

While passing through Burlington, Iowa, recently, I saw a mounted Man-o'-war-bird (*Frigata aquila*) in a store window. Upon inquiry I was told that the bird was killed in the spring of 1904. It was first noticed by some hunters as it flew along the Illinois shore of the Mississippi, who shot at it, when it turned and flew across the river into the heart of the city of Burlington where it struck an electric light wire and fell into the street. The next day it died and the man who picked it up had it mounted and exhibited in his window. This is the first record for Illinois and also for Iowa, as far as I know.

James Hodges (1949), writing about rare birds he had seen along the Mississippi, included the following account under Man-o'-war-bird:

It was my good fortune on April 1, 1946 to observe this species at Davenport, Scott County. I was coming out of a small stand of timber and happened to look up in the air to see coming toward me the most majestic and graceful bird that I had ever seen. It was heading north at 7:45 a.m. and I had perfect conditions under which to see it. The bird was flying at about 300 feet altitude. The flight was smooth and effortless with its beautiful contoured wings slowly beating the air. It was flying sideways instead of straight ahead as most birds do. It was several miles from the Mississippi River which borders the south side of the county but I believe that the bird was following the course of this river. The plumage of the bird was white suggesting an immature bird. The body of the birds [sic] was very small compared to the size of its wings and tail. The tail was long and dagger like which completed the identification. The text books relate that the tail is forked but from the distance that I saw the bird the tail was shaped much more like a dagger. It has been over two years since I made this observation but I have hesitated publishing it as I thought the veracity of the record might be questioned but after considerable deliberation on my part I think the record should be considered valid. It could be mistaken for no other species that is found in the state of Iowa, in fact no other bird could compare with it in size and beauty of flight...

The Records Committee evaluated these old records in the early 1980s and rejected all of them for various reasons. There was no description by Peck, and Hodges' description is rather sketchy, delayed, and expresses some doubt. The varying accounts of the Burlington birds are all delayed and secondhand and leave some doubt as to whether there were one, two, or three birds. It seems odd that Bartsch, who compiled a bibliography of Iowa birds for his Masters Degree thesis, would not have referred to Anderson's quote from him relating to a September 1903 record. It seems likely that some, if not all, of these historical records are correct, but, unfortunately the details provided are not complete enough or possibly could have been incorrectly related.

VAGRANCY IN NORTH AMERICA

Magnificent Frigatebird breeds as far north as the Florida Keys, the central coast of Texas, and Baja California. Birds wander in the Gulf of Mexico and up both coasts of United States. East Coast records are fairly evenly distributed from April through September with one or two records from October, December, January, and February. Less than 10 percent of the citations mention preceding storms. Birds have been recorded as far north as New-

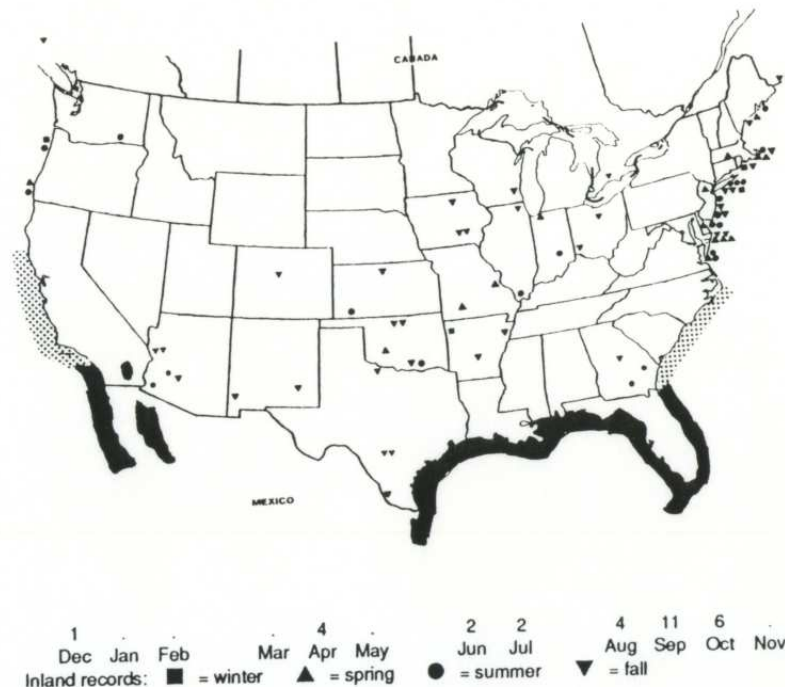
foundland (1) and Nova Scotia (2). Immatures, females, and males are mentioned with about equal frequency.

West Coast records, including California, are mostly from July and August, with one to three records from January, February, March, June, September, and October. Storms are mentioned as a possible factor for about 5 percent of the sightings. Birds are recorded as far north as Alaska (3) and British Columbia (1). The vast majority of West Coast birds are immatures.

Inland records are mostly from August through October with a peak in September. There are four April records, two each from June and July, and one from December. Over 40 percent of the citations mention hurricanes or severe storms preceding arrival of the birds. Unfortunately, the age and sex are infrequently mentioned; I found reports of 1 immature, 4 females, and 1 male, but half of these are the current Iowa records.

These findings suggest three different patterns of vagrancy: birds of varying age and sex wandering north along the East Coast during warm months; immatures wandering north along the West Coast in late summer; and predominantly adults being carried inland during the hurricane season.

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD



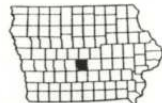
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SABINE'S GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE



At 4:05 p.m. on 20 October 1988, I noticed a small, brown-mantled gull resting with other gulls on a large mud bar north of the Jester Park area of Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co. Initially, the bird looked like a small, first-winter Franklin's Gull; however, after studying the bird for several minutes, I concluded that the bird must be a juvenile Sabine's Gull. Bob Myers joined me at about 5:15 p.m., and we watched the bird until 5:50 p.m.

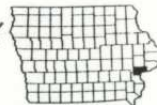
The bird remained resting on the mud bar until about 4:25 p.m., when it flew. In flight, the striking wing pattern was obvious. The outer primaries were black, forming a triangle from the bend of the wing outward. The inner wing, out to a line from the bend of the wing to the tip of the inner most secondary, was brown. The rest of the wing was white. In flight, the tail was slightly forked and was white except for a black terminal band. When perched, the upperparts, crown, and nape were light brown. The wings were darker than the rest of the upperparts. The underparts and forehead were white. The legs were black. The bill was also black and was shorter and thicker than the bill of a Franklin's Gull. The wing pattern and gray-brown crown, nape, and upperparts identified the bird as a juvenile Sabine's Gull.

This is the sixth record of a Sabine's Gull in Iowa. There are three old records and three recent ones, all from fall. The other recent records are both from Saylorville Reservoir: 10-24 November 1983 (Kent, T. H. 1983. Sabine's Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 53: 105-106) and 5 October 1986 (IBL 57: 17, 78).

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames, IA 50010

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER IN MUSCATINE COUNTY

GERALD WHITE



On 12 May 1988, I was taking an early morning birding walk in Wild Cat Den State Park. At 7:20 a.m., I was in an area of the woods that had an edge transition zone, when a small bird flew out of heavy cover and landed about 30 feet away in a small bare tree. Although the bird had its back to me, it did turn and look at me twice during its brief period of exposure. I was able to

see the following features: mid-sized warbler by shape and size (about 5 inches long); black crown; back and rump had the base color of dark olive with black spots that were most noticeable around the shoulder area (The spots gave the impression of streaking.); two white wing bars; dull white undertail coverts; some dark feathers in the shape of possible spots near the flank; cheek and ear covered with a good-sized patch of black surrounded with yellow (Each color had intense color saturation.); black throat; and dark and warbler-shaped bill.

I was not able to see the side or complete front of the bird; however, the features of the head and throat as illustrated in the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* were those of a male Townsend's Warbler. The black spots clinched my identification in the field. I did not realize until evening that I had seen a record bird (second for Iowa) and, regretfully, had not notified many fellow birders. A subsequent search with tape recordings on the following day failed to produce the bird again.

1505 E. 5th St., Muscatine, Iowa 52761

VERMILION FLYCATCHER AT RICE LAKE

GERALD ANDERSON



A male Vermilion Flycatcher was found catching insects along a small creek that runs into Rice Lake in Worth County at 10:30 a.m. on 13 May 1988. It had a red breast, brown streak between the red on the top of the head and the red throat, and brown wings. It was smaller than a Cardinal. The bird repeatedly swooped down from its perch on a small tree to catch insects and returned to a perch. Curt Rector and I watched the bird for five minutes from a distance of 30 to 40 feet in bright sunlight.

RR2, Lake Mills, IA 50450

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FROM DIANE PORTER

I have some questions about Chimney Swifts that I hope *Iowa Bird Life* readers can answer for me: (1) Do Chimney Swifts roosting or nesting in chimneys create any fire hazard?; and (2) Do their droppings cause any significant inconvenience or health hazard?

Migrating Chimney Swifts return each year in flocks numbering several thousand birds to ancestral roosting places. I talked by telephone in 1987 with Chimney Swift expert Richard B. Fischer, retired Professor of Environmental Education, Cornell University. He told me that Chimney Swifts do not nest communally. The large aggregations of birds are nonbreeding individuals, those that have finished their nesting for the season, and migrating birds. In light of this information, one would not expect a buildup of nests to cause a fire hazard in the chimneys used by large flocks in migration. Also, I have heard the speculation that the birds' movements in and out of the chimneys actually help clean the chimneys and hence reduce the fire hazard.

85-11

What species? Magnificent Frigatebird How many? 1 Female
 Location? Crane Street on south shore of Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa
 Type of Habitat? Residential area on wooded lakeshore
 When? date(s): 25 Sep, 1988 time: 11:20 AM to 11:26 AM *Not below
 Who? your name and address: Jan L. Walter 934-13th St. SE, Mason City, Ia. 50401
 Others with you: Jim Walter

Others before or after you: 24 Sep 1988 Joel Hanes, Daryl & Patricia Hansen
25 Sep, 1988 Jim & Steve Dinsmore 26 Sep, 1988 Jim Walter

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Much larger than Turkey Vulture, with extremely long, narrow wings, inward curve on leading edge of inner wing, sharply swept back at wrist, and pointed at tips. Long tail was deeply forked with forks squared off at tips. Long, gray bill was sharply hooked at tip. Bird was all black except for a white breast with the black of the throat extending back into the breast in a V and the black of the belly extending forward into the breast in a less distinct V. The bird slowly circled above us about 15-20 feet above tree top level, at one time directly overhead as we stood in the middle of the street. It was silent.

Similar species; how eliminated: Size, wing length and shape, long forked tail, white breast on an otherwise all black bird are diagnostic of female Magnificent Frigatebird.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No
 If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
Late morning sun striking bird on all sides as it circled.
50-60 feet (guess)
8x40 binoculars

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Saw several dozen at Willemstad, Curacao and off north coast of South America (1977) and 1 at the Port of Miami, FL. (1982)

References and persons consulted before writing description:
A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America, Golden Press; Field Guide to the Birds of North America, National Geographic Society after hearing first report of the bird.
 How long before field notes made? right after this form completed? 7 Hours
bird disappeared from sight.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).
 *Earlier in the morning at 9:40 we saw the Frigatebird circling high above the lake beneath a Gull for 2 minutes.

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Magnificent Frigatebird

How Many? 1 female

Location? Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo Co.-over island on south side of lake

Habitat? circling over lake with gulls

Date? 25 Sep 1988

Time? 4:05-4:07 p.m.

Observers Name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50010

Others who saw bird: Jim Dinsmore, m.ob.

Description of bird: We arrived at Clear Lake around 2 p.m. to look for the bird. We drove around the entire lake searching for the bird without luck. Finally, at about 4 p.m., we pulled into Clear Lake S.P. I began scanning through the hundreds of Franklin's Gulls that were circling over the lake and noticed a much larger bird soaring with them. We followed the bird for 2-3 minutes before we lost it. The bird was huge compared to the gulls, probably 3-4 times larger. The wings were very long and narrow and were pointed. The wings were held crooked, like an Osprey, and were bowed down near the tip (see sketch). The bird was entirely dark except for a lighter patch that appeared to be on the belly and lower throat. The neck was fairly long and extended straight out from the shoulder. The bill was long, heavy, and looked dark. We couldn't see any hook on the bill from our distance. The tail was proportionately long and the tail feathers were mostly held together, although the bird did spread its tail when it banked once. I would have guessed that the tail was over a foot in length, but that's just a guess.

Similar species and how eliminated: The size, tail shape, shape of the wings, white patch on the underparts, and bill shape eliminates all other birds, although there are really no other birds that look even remotely similar to this species.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were o.k., although the bird was a long way off. Estimated viewing distance was 0.5 mile. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen many frigatebirds in Florida and the Dry Tortugas.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? written 1 hour after the sighting

How long before this form was completed? 5 hours

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species? Magnificent Frigatebird

How Many? one

Location? south side of Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo County

Habitat? freshwater lake

Date? 25 Sept 1988

Time? shortly after 4 p.m.

Observers Name and address: Jim Dinsmore
4024 Arkansas Drive, Ames

Others who saw bird: Steve Dinsmore

Description of bird:

I saw the bird for only 20-30 seconds but got a distinct look at it in flight. It was large, about 3 + times the size of the Franklin's Gulls it was flying with. The color appeared all dark. Wings were long, thin, and pointed at tips. There was a distinct crook in the wings about half way out on their length giving it a "cupped" appearance. The tail was long, thin and the tail streamers seemed to be held together. I could distinctly see that the bird had a long tail but did not get the forked tail view. The neck was of medium length and the head was small. Did not look at bill. I saw the bird circle a few times, during which it did not flap its wings. The second I saw the bird I had a side view and saw the long tail, long wings, and the crook in the wings and I recognized the bird as a frigate bird immediately.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Nothing else matches this bird in its size and shape other than another species of frigatebird which is even more unlikely

Viewing conditions and equipment:

20 power spotting scope. Bird was about 1/2 mile away and I was looking toward sun so didn't see any color other than dark but shape, behavior, and size were distinct

Previous experience with species:

I have spent hundreds of hours in the field in frigatebird country in Florida, the Dry Tortugas, and Trinidad and Tobago and have seen them on hundreds of occasions

References consulted:none

How long before field notes were made? 35 minutes after seeing bird

How long before this form was completed? next morning, 15 hours later

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

88-11

11-78
What species? Magnificent Frigatebird How many? 1
Location? Clear Lake Iowa
Type of Habitat? Flying over lake & lakeshore
When? date(s): 25 Sep. 1988 time: 2:05 to 6:10 CDT
Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 Air Cè 'on Blvd, Decatur, IA 52001
Others with you: Mary Lou Petersen, Ann Barker, Francis Moore
Others before or after you: Jim & Steve Dinsmore & many others

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Huge bird, very dark gray-black except white chest long, ~~thick~~ pointed wings; long, deeply forked tail. Bird not heard & did not flap wings while under observation. Size judged by nearby Ring-billed Gulls.

Similar species; how eliminated: Nothing is similar except Great Frigatebird which is not known for central IA. This would not be separable from the range involved in this observation

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Full, late afternoon sun behind observers - distance estimated 1/2 mi.
33x scope, 40x scope, 60x binoculars, 20x scope. Bird seen over Mt. Lutescens from Ventura causeway.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen many in tropics - saw hundreds in Galapagos Islands in July of 1988

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 45 min. this form completed? 1 day

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

What species? Magnificent Frigatebird ♀ How many? 1Location? north-central Iowa - Clear LakeType of habitat? large lake with wooded peninsula, island, etc.When? date(s): September 25, 1988 time: 4:40 PM to 4:55 PMWho? your name and address: Beth Proescholdt, Liscomb, Iowaothers with you: Mark Proescholdtothers before or after you: Jim + Steve Dinsmore - et al

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Steve + Jim Dinsmore spotted it about 4:00 PM but it disappeared before we could see it. We searched for 40 minutes before I spotted it about 3/4 to a mile away over the island to the NW - high, about 45° - a dark silhouette with long wings that never flapped. A huge dark bird, much larger - 3-4 times larger - than the Franklin's Gulls in the air. The wings were very long + narrow + pointed, with a prominent crook at the wrists. The body was long, + it + the head were dark with white on the upper or central undersides.

For the 15 minutes I watched it the bird floated on air, moving slowly closer to us. Twice it moved the tips of its wings. As it moved closer + to our right the sun was behind us + with scopes we were able to see the white on it + the long forked tail. It never got close enough to see the long bill.

We were both scooping it, trying to keep it in sight, when it just disappeared. We were not able to find it again.

Similar species and how eliminated: no other speciesDid any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

clear, except for few clouds on horizon - 3/4 to 1 mile to
8x40 Nikon binocs - 22x Bushnell scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: neverReferences and persons consulted before writing description: all field guidesHow long before field notes made? at once this form completed? Oct 4, 1988

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? Magnificent Frigatebird How many? 1

Location? Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County

Type of habitat? Large lake with marshy area on west end

When? date(s): Sept. 25, 1988 time: 4:40 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.

Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa

others with you: Beth Proescholdt, Steve and Jim Dinsmore

others before or after you: Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, Bob Myers, Jim Sinclair, Beth Brown, many more

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Steve and Jim Dinsmore spotted it around 4:00 p.m., but Mom and I couldn't locate it. They had to go then. Mom spotted it far away above the island area $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 mile away. We watched it as it came toward us and then past ($\frac{1}{4}$ mile closest to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away again).

It was a very large black bird that was sailing and soaring all the time. It did not flap its wings ever, however the wing tips dipped a couple of times. Its wings were cupped or hunched like the profile of an osprey (crook in wings). It had a large white area on its breast, a dark head, and a very narrow black tail which was definitely forked. I saw the forked tail 2 or 3 times in the scope. It was flying and soaring all by itself all the time we viewed it. I saw its sideways profile and its long narrow body. It glided quite a distance. It sailed at us, then past us, and to the east end of the lake. Then all of a sudden, we lost sight of it and didn't see it again. It was quite windy when we saw it.

Similar species and how eliminated:

I can't think of a similar species!

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Sunny with wispy clouds. Sun at our sides at first and then right behind us. Distances estimated. 8x30 Binocs. 22x Scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Had never seen a frigatebird before.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Natl. Geog. guide, Robbins' field guide, R.T. Peterson field guide.

How long before field notes made? 5:50 p.m. this form completed? Oct. 6, 1988

that afternoon

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? FRIGATEBIRD - MAGNIFICENT How many? 1Location? CLEAR LAKE - CERRO GORDO COUNTYType of habitat? LAKEWhen? date(s): 26 SEPT time: 7:10 AM to 8:40 AM - FOR SEVERAL VIEWINGS OF SEVERAL MINUTEWho? your name and address: JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, IOWA CITYothers with you: TOM KENTothers before or after you: M.O.B.

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

THE BIRD WAS FIRST OBSERVED AT A DISTANCE OF 1 MILE + FLOATING ABOVE TREELINE (MOST OF THE TIME). IT WAS LATER OBSERVED 4 TIMES AT MUCH CLOSER RANGE - SEVERAL HUNDRED YARDS AND ONCE FROM 40-100 YARDS FOR 2-3 MINUTES WITH SUN AT MY BACK. THE GENERAL SIZE WAS VERY LARGE BUT THE ONLY BIRDS TO COMPARE IT TO WERE RING-BILLED GULLS AND IT WAS APPROXIMATELY TWICE THEIR SIZE + WINGSPAN. IT HAD VERY LONG POINTED WINGS WHICH HAD 2 BENDS IN THEM WHEN SEEN FROM BELOW AND FROM FRONT + BACK A ROUNDED AREA NEAR BODY (SEE DIAGRAM ON BACK) THE BIRD WAS GENERALLY BLACK (ACTUALLY A BROWNISH-BLACK IN GOOD LIGHT). TAIL WAS LONG AND FORKED DEEPLY INTO 2 (AND SOMETIMES 3 PORTIONS) THE HEAD WAS BLACK AND THE EYE DARK. THERE WAS A WHITE BAND WHICH STARTED AT THE NECK AND ENDED AT MID-WING. THERE ALSO WERE SUBTLE WHITE MARKS WHICH EXTENDED A SHORT DISTANCE ONTO THE UNDER WING FROM THE WHITE AREA. THE BODY WAS NEARLY ALL

Similar species and how eliminated:

OTHER FRIGATEBIRDS

(OVER)

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

9X36 BINOCULARS, BRIEFLY IN 20X SCOPEFROM 40 YARDS - 1 MILE + CLEAR SKIES, STRONG S. WIND

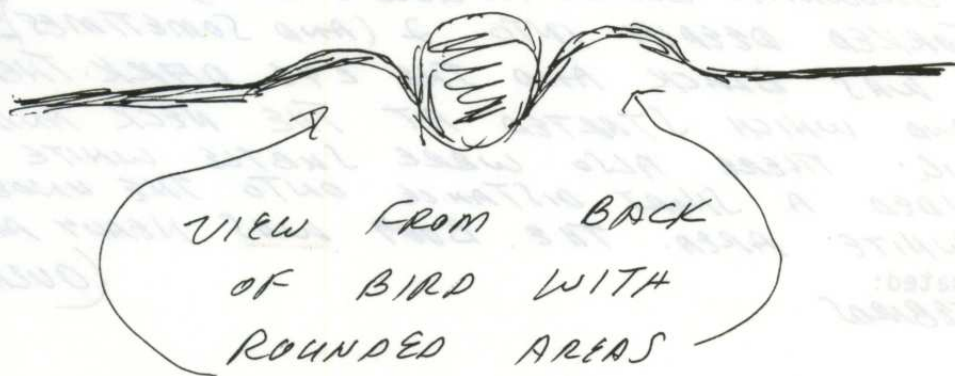
Previous experience with species and similar ones:

NONEReferences and persons consulted before writing description: NAT'L GEOG.How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATELY this form completed? 12 HOURS +

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

88-11
THE RED (PINKISH RED) FEET COULD BE SEEN TUCKED UP AGAINST BODY ON ONE OCCASION AT CLOSE RANGE. THE BILL WAS SHAPED LIKE THAT OF A CORMORANT - LONG AND THIN - AND DOWNTURNED LIKE A NAIL AT THE END. COLOR OF BILL WAS LIGHT GRAY.

IT MOSTLY GLIDED, DRIFTED, AND SOARED ~~AND~~ POINTING INTO THE STRONG SOUTH WIND. IT ALMOST LOOKED LIKE A KITE - SOMETIMES WOBBLING + TILTING IN THE WINGS, BUT RARELY FLAPPING ITS WINGS. IT DID DIVE DOWN TO THE WATER SEVERAL TIMES, BUT CAME BACK UP TO TREETOP OR HIGHER HEIGHT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. IT WAS NOT SEEN TO LAND ON THE WATER, OR TO PERCH AT ANY TIME.



DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

88-11

What species? Magnificent Frigatebird How many? 1 ♀

Location? Clear Lake, Cerro Gordo Co., IA

Type of Habitat? Large oval natural lake

When? date(s): 26 Sept. 1988 7¹⁰-7³⁰ a.m. 8⁰⁰-8⁰² 9⁰⁰-9⁰¹ 9²²-9³⁵ 10⁰²-10⁰⁵
time: _____ to _____

Who? your name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Others with you: Jim Fuller, Curt Nelson, Bohmyer, Gene + Elvise Armstrong, ~~John~~ Sinclair, B. R. Brown

Others before or after you: Jim + Steve Hugmore, Francis Moore, Pete Petersen + others

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A very large long-winged dark bird at least twice size of Ring-billed Gull.

Wings long, narrow, pointed, and crooked.

Wings held above body. Tail long and forked.

When over head, tail looked ragged.

Bird all dark except for white chest. Fuller said white went to base of wings.

Head dark. Bill long and hooked at end. Soaring flight with occasional flaps. Mostly seen soaring at great distance. Easy to pick out.

Bird flew directly over Jim Fuller + myself and filled over 1/2 of my 400 mm lens. Photos. Moore said he saw some white on head, otherwise features fit adult female.



Similar species; how eliminated: No other similar species that I know of

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Swamy with strong south wind. Found about 1 week after hurricane Gilbert hit Texas.

Bird 1/2 mile to about 100 ft. 10x binoc, 20x scope, 400mm camera lens

Previous experience with species and similar ones: have seen many in Florida + Dry Tortugas

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 2 hrs after first seen this form completed? 10 hrs

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

What species? Magnificent Frigatebird How many? 1Location? Clear Lake State Park, Cerro Gordo Co., IA.Type of Habitat? Lake surrounded by townWhen? date(s): 26 Sept. '88 time: 9:00 am to 10:30 amWho? your name and address: Mike Thomas, 2517 47th St., De Moines IA., 50310Others with you: Ann Johnson,Others before or after you: ?

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A large (over 6 ft. wingspan) "dull black bird with a white breast, long forked tail, very narrow wings, narrow bill soaring" at various heights over the northern edge of Clear Lake. Viewed for c. 10 min. - from south side of lake. Viewed at close range from west side of Clear Lake later, where the "downward hook at tip of bill" was visible.

Similar species; how eliminated: none.Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

Clear, wind from south. Viewed initially from south side of lake as bird soared over northern part of lake with 8x40 binoculars and 60mm scope @ c. 25x-30x. Later, viewed from west side of lake (near Ventura Marsh) with binoculars at c. 100 yards as bird swooped low over lake just in front of us.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: none, life bird.References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geographic Field Guide used to confirm species and sex (female) as this is life bird at time bird was seen.How long before field notes made? 5-10 min this form completed? 2 months

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).