

Magnificent Frigatebird
2 Oct 1988
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA
*DeVore
IBL 59:9, 76, Kent 1989

Record Number: 88-12
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Dawn L. DeVore

NOTE

Ann Johnson to Records Committee, no date

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:9

Records Committee: IBL 59:76

Kent, T. H. 1989. Magnificent Frigatebirds in Iowa. IBL
59:56-62.

VOTE: 6-A-D, 1-NA

A-D. Excellent description and sketches of female frigatebird. Description leaves little doubt about identification.

A-D. The close view (without binoculars), drawings, and realistic details by a relatively inexperienced observer are convincing for this easily identified species. The computer generated documentation similar to that of Ann Johnson's for other species, long delay in making notes, and quizzing by Johnson may have introduced artifactual clues. Also, it is disappointing that this sighting of a rare bird was not confirmed by multiple observations.

A-D. Good study and documentation of this species. Definately describes magnificent frigatebird.

NA. A-D frigatebird sp. A nice documentation. Again, presumably a Magnificent, but according to Harrison ("Seabirds"), imm. female Great Frigatebird is the only Magnificent/Great with a "cleavage" in the center of the white breast area. I have to believe, however, that "cleavage" is a transition in plumage on what is most likely a female Magnificent. I would like to consider this bird a Frigatebird sp., as there is indeed a Great Frigatebird specimen from Oklahoma, and the observer failed to even consider this sp. as a possibility. Also, consider ad. female Lesser Frigatebird poss. as likely as Great--there is a record from Maine (It has divided white "breast" area).

REVOTE: 6-A-D, 1-NA

A-D. Black throat on photo by Kent eliminates Great Frigatebird. [sic, photo not for this record]

NA. Vote A-D for figatebird sp. Possibility of a Great Frigatebird not ruled out.

A-D. I agree with NA comments, but it is a matter of taste. Iowa would look silly compared to other states if we listed only Frigatebird sp.

A-D. Shape of white areas on breast as described in this record excludes both Lesser and Great Frigatebirds as described and illustrated in the Harrison Guide.

A-D. I have serious questions about our consistency--we vote Rufous Hummingbird to Salaphorus sp. because of possibility of Allen's, but are not willing to do this with frigatebirds. There

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union
Magnificent Frigatebird

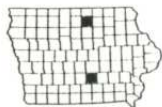
Printed: 08/04/93

2 Oct 1988 RC No. 88-12 (cont)

is just as much if not more evidence of other (unlikely)
possibilities with Mag. Frigatebird as for Rufous Hummingbird.
SEND TO: Dawn L. DeVore, 1209 Stephen Ct., Indianola, IA 50125

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

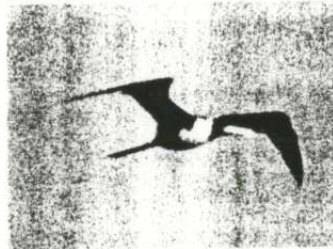
A female frigatebird was found over Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County and word of the sighting was passed to birders around the state by Curt Nelson and others. The first documentor was Jan Walter who saw the bird briefly at 9:40 a.m. on 25 September 1988 and much closer at 11:20 a.m. She noted the following:

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.

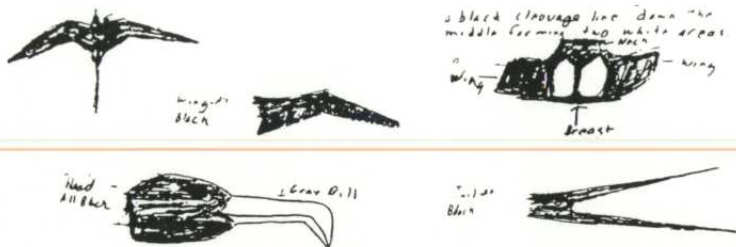


Female Magnificent Frigatebird at Clear Lake. Photos by Alan W. Hancock (left) and T. H. Kent (right).

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.

88-12



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*).

58-12

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



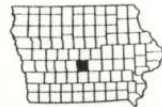
58-12

LITERATURE CITED

- Anderson, R. M. 1907. The birds of Iowa. Proc. Davenport Acad. Sci. 11:125-417.
Bartsch, P. 1922. An inland record of the Man-o'-war-bird. Auk 39:249-250.
Briggs, S. 1969. Some notes on an early Iowa record and Paul Bartsch. Iowa Bird Life 39:85-87.
Coale, H. K. 1910. A new bird for Illinois. Auk 27:75.
DuMont, P. A. 1933. A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa. Iowa City: University of Iowa Studies in Natural History, Vol. 15, No. 5.
Harrison, P. 1983. Seabirds an Identification Guide. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Hodges, J. 1949. Notes on the bird life in the Mississippi Valley. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 56:343-345.
Peck, M. E. 1896. Note. Iowa Ornithologist 2:34.
Synder, D. E. 1961. First record of the Least Frigate-bird (*Fregata ariel*) in North America. Auk 78:265.

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.

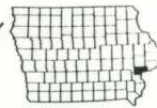
The bird remained resting on the mud bar until about 4:25 p.m., when it flew. In flight, the striking wing pattern was obvious. The outer primaries were black, forming a triangle from the bend of the wing outward. The inner wing, out to a line from the bend of the wing to the tip of the inner most secondary, 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

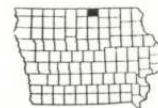
see the following features: mid-sized warbler by shape and size (about 5 inches long); black crown; back and rump had the base color of dark olive with black spots that were most noticeable around the shoulder area (The spots gave the impression of streaking.); two white wing bars; dull white undertail 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.

88-12

To: IOU Records Committee

From: Ann Johnson

Re: Documentation of Magnificent Frigatebird

This note is simply to introduce Dawn DeVore, whose documentation of a magnificent frigatebird is attached. I thought a brief introduction might be helpful in light of the importance of her sighting; i.e., a distinctly different bird than the one seen the following day by Gladys Black and David Youngblut.

Dawn is a junior in environmental studies at Simpson College and has been working part-time this fall for the Corps of Engineers at Lake Red Rock. She is a beginning birder but has also shown a great deal of caution as evidenced by her failure to add a Bonaparte's gull to her life list this fall because of uncertainty, although I have seen a number of them from her work site. In my estimation, her caution, added to her approach to detail in trying to learn new birds, lend a great deal of credibility to her report. Prior to her writing of her documentation, I used my best investigative skills to qualify the report and her description has held fast since that Sunday night she first called me.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Magnificent Frigatebird (Fregata Magnificens) - Female
 Location: Behind Visitor Center at Lake Red Rock, Marion Co., IA
 Habitat: Freshwater lake shore
 Date(s): 10/2/88 Time: 12:45 pm to 12:50 pm
 Name and Address: Dawn L. DeVore, 1209 Stephen Ct. Indianola, IA 50125

Other observers: none

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 behavior and voice.

On my lunch hour I had placed my sandwich in the microwave and was going to get some pop. As I passed by the windows at the back of the office facing the lake, I spotted a "large black silhouette". Being a birdwatcher, I paused, thinking at first it was a turkey vulture passing by. However, I quickly realized that it was not a turkey vulture for the body, wings, and tail were too streamlined and slender. The shape that I saw reminded me of a Caspian Tern due to its slender and streamlined body, but the wing span and body were too big. The tail was also different; it reminded me of a barn swallow's tail, but the tail was longer and not always held in the V shape. Realizing that the bird's "body" was "black", I ruled out all of the birds that I knew of that could be in the area and began to make more mental notes of the bird I was seeing.

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 "squarely turned down tip". There was no red on the underside of the head. The neck seemed to flow from head into 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 two white areas. The white areas looked like breasts on a female human - two 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.

Similar species and how eliminated:

After getting the bird book, I took my knowledge of the birds in the area and my mental picture and went to work. I ruled out the turkey vulture because the bird was too streamlined like a tern. I looked at the terns, soon realizing that there were no almost completely black terns. Thus I turned to the gulls.

88-12

88-12

Mag. Frigatebird
Down De Vore
pg. 2

I knew it had to be a water area type bird because of its body and bill shape. Remembering the bill I quickly ruled out the gulls. Thus I turned to the cormorants but the tail was wrong, the neck was too long and more so the cormorant was out of the picture. Thinking I recalled hearing about a sighting of a rare bird in Iowa, only the night before had I looked at an outline of its body shape. Bingo! That was it! The shapes matched but what was the name? I went through the water bird section page by page. Then there it was - the Magnificent Frigatebird. This was it; almost all black, large yet streamlined, "forked" or V shaped "tail", and that unique bill. Then the fact that the bird I saw had no red and two side by side white breast areas confirmed that it was a female Magnificent Frigatebird.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? NA

If yes, explain:

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

Scattered white fluffy clouds to clear; past noon lighting; I would say that the bird was around twenty yards away. I figure I could have hit it with a baseball and I can only throw one just over twenty yards. Optical Equipment: my own two eyes.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

None.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Ann Johnson (who quizzed her unmercifully that evening! - aj)

Peterson Field Guide to the Birds

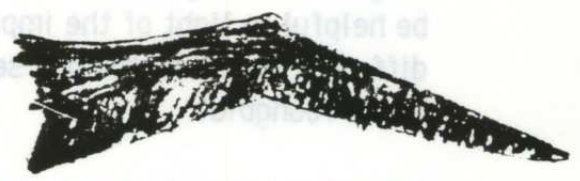
How long before field notes made? 7 hours How long before this form completed? 4 days

88-12

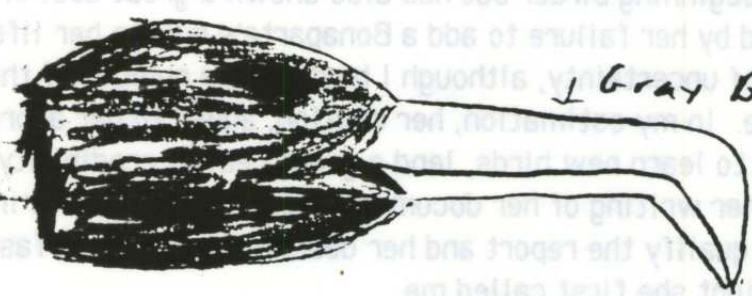
Mag. Frigatebird
Dawn DeVore
pg. 3



Wing - All
Black

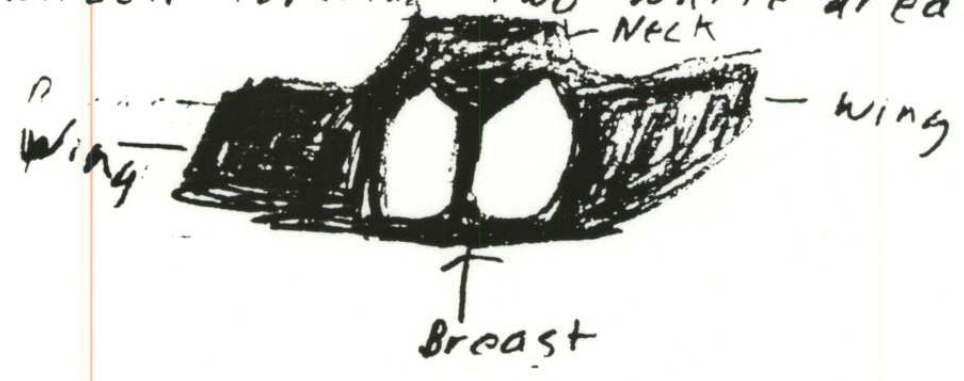


Head -
All Black

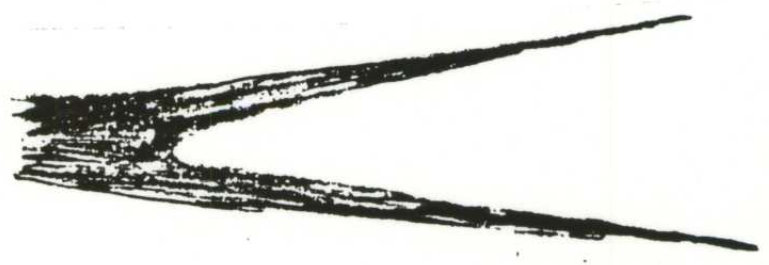


Gray Bill

a black cleavage line down the
middle forming two white areas.



Tail - All
Black



To: IOU Records Committee

From: Ann Johnson

Re: Documentation of Magnificent Frigatebird

This note is simply to introduce Dawn DeVore, whose documentation of a magnificent frigatebird is attached. I thought a brief introduction might be helpful in light of the importance of her sighting; i.e., a distinctly different bird than the one seen the following day by Gladys Black and David Youngblut.

Dawn is a junior in environmental studies at Simpson College and has been working part-time this fall for the Corps of Engineers at Lake Red Rock. She is a beginning birder but has also shown a great deal of caution as evidenced by her failure to add a Bonaparte's gull to her life list this fall because of uncertainty, although I have seen a number of them from her work site. In my estimation, her caution, added to her approach to detail in trying to learn new birds, lend a great deal of credibility to her report. Prior to her writing of her documentation, I used my best investigative skills to qualify the report and her description has held fast since that Sunday night she first called me.

