

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Western Grebe 2. Number: 1

3. Location Mud Lake, 4 mi N of Ruthven, Iowa

4. Date: 15 June 1979, also present on 16+17 June 5. Time Bird seen: 3 to 3:30 pm

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

Large swimming water bird, somewhat larger than Redheads that were in area, Neck very long and slender. Back of bird, dorsal surface of neck and head dark gray to almost black on top of head. Lower half of head and front of neck white. White on neck formed S shape while bird was swimming. Some light "mottling" evident on back. Bill light colored, long, very slender and sharply pointed.

7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard

8. Description of behavior: swimming, some preening and diving

9. Habitat - general: fresh water lake
specific: in open water

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

Common Loon - This bird was not big enough, neck was too long and bill too thin for winter plumage loon

11. Distance' (how measured)? est. 150 m to 1/4 mile w bird 12. Optical equipment: 7x20-45 scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): partly cloudy, sun behind me - perfect light for observation

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Saw W. Grebe (ca 10) in North Dakota less than 1 week before these observations

15. Other observers: Steve and Mark Dinmore

16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: none

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Robbins et al - bird matched it perfectly

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3 days

Signature James J. Dinmore Address: 4024 Arkansas Drive

Date: 10 June 1979 City, State: Ames, Iowa

Note: The one on Mud Lake was seen 15-17 June when I left the area
Also saw 4 more on nearby Trumbull Lake on the evening of 15 June, right after leaving Mud Lake so at least 5 were around. Didn't see other 4 on the 16th.

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, there really is no need to describe your observations in writing. But, if you have seen something unusual and want to share this experience with others, a written description is essential. It is true your immediate friends who know and respect your ability probably will accept your report without question, but what about those who do not know you, particularly the bird students 100 years from now who cannot know you? Also, what about the habitual skeptics? And most importantly, what about the compilers of regional bird lists who probably will insist that records be scientifically sound? All these critics will investigate your observation not because they assume you are wrong, but merely because they ordinarily expect verification. Whether the individual demanding verification realizes it or not, in doing so, he is employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

If your observation involves a common species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season, verification is not obtained easily and special documentation is necessary. The best documentation is a collected specimen, and many bird students insist this is the only acceptable evidence. However, others recognize the importance and reliability of sight records accumulated by the experienced field observer, and maintain that even extraordinary sight records are acceptable if accompanied by an adequate verifying description.

It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

It should also be pointed out that with the great photographic equipment now available, species identification from photographs are possible. Such species documentation are highly desirable and should be sent to the state editors or to large museums.

11. Distance (how measured) _____

12. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): _____

13. Conditions experienced with this species and similarly appearing species: _____

14. Other observers: _____

15. Did the others agree with your identification? _____

16. Other observers who independently identified this bird: _____

17. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: _____

18. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? _____

Signature: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____

Date: _____

Notes: _____