

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Ross' Goose (Anser rossii) 2. Number: Five (5)
3. Location DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge Harrison County, Iowa
4. Date: 25 November 1980 5. Time Bird seen: 15:00 to 15:15
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): All individuals were white geese with black wing tips, and red legs and bill. All lacked grin patch. Bill size proportionately smaller than in Snow Goose. Five birds observed were all about 2/3 the size of the juvenile snow geese in the same flock, i.e. substantially smaller.
7. Description of voice, if heard:
8. Description of behavior: Feeding in a flock of about 500 Snow Geese in cornfield at the waters edge on the refuge. Ross' Geese were spread throughout the flock and did not appear to be in association.
9. Habitat - general: refuge
specific: Habitat- Cornfield within 30m of refuge lake, near road that runs through
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
11. Distance (how measured)? Estimated 50 meters 12. Optical equipment: 15x-60x spotting scope (at 30x)
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Bright light, 0-10% cloud cover sun behind me (facing northeast).
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
15. Other observers: Snow Goose observation
Robert Fredrick Dept of Animal Ecology, Iowa State University
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
Robert Fredrick
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Previous experience with Ross' Goose study skins allowed identification.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 9 days

Robert Fredrick Address: Dept. of Animal Ecology Iowa State Univ.
Signature

Date: 4 December 1980 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50011

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.