


Middlewestern Prairie Region
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species dark phase glossy ibis species 2. Number: 1
3. Location 2½ miles east of Colo on old highway 30 in a flooded field
4. Date: September 29, October 1 5. Time Bird seen: 6:00 PM to 6:30 PM
1978 2:30 PM 3:15 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): September 29 - bird had been spooked with some Pintail ducks from the pond and was circling in the sky. Dark body  profile
October 1 - plumage appeared to be black but when reflected in the sun a bronze sheen was apparent - it appeared to be about two feet in height - its beak was black and was bordered by the black-bronze color of feathers - its beak was about five inches in length and was curved down - its legs were black with three toes.
7. Description of voice, if heard: none
8. Description of behavior: the bird was feeding and constantly moving along the waterline probing the ground
9. Habitat - general: flooded field
specific: marsh grass and mud flat
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
11. Distance (how measured)? 40-50 yards, walked off 12. Optical equipment:
Bushnell Binoculars 8X40
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Sky clear, sunny with sun at my back looking at the bird
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
glossy ibis, Pt. Pelee Canada; white ibis, Everglades Florida; white-faced
15. Other observers: glossy ibis, Bear River Refuge, Ogden, Utah
Linda Zaletel on September 29
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Dr. Jim Dinsmore
Woodward Brown
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
A Field Guide to the Birds - Peterson
A Guide to Field Identification of Birds of North America - Robbins, Bruun, Zim
Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds - Eastern
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? Two weeks
Hank Zaletel Address: 667 Pammel Ct.
Signature
- Date: October 24, 1978 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50010

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.

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19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
Two weeks
Address: 607 Bammel Ct.
Signature: Hank Eitel
Date: October 24, 1978
City, State: Amer., Iowa 50046