

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

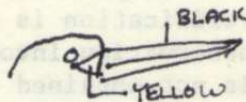
1. Species SNOWY EGRET 2. Number: ONE

3. Location HENDRICKSON MARSH

4. Date: 3-27-85 5. Time Bird seen: 6:15 PM to 6:50 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): SMALL PURE WHITE, SMALL

EGRET; YELLOW EYE, LONG, SLENDER BLACK BEAK, SKIN AT  
END OF BEAK UNDER EYE YELLOW, BLACK LEGS, FEET UN-  
SEEN.



7. Description of voice, if heard: NONE

8. Description of behavior: PROBING MUD FLAT, THEN FLEW A 360° CIRCLE AND THEN  
LANDED ON TOP OF 25 FT SNAG

9. Habitat - general: MARSH  
specific: MUDFLAT WITH SNAGS

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
CATTLE EGRET - SHORT THICK YELLOW <sup>BILL</sup> BEAK, YELLOW LEGS

AMERICAN EGRET - LONG SLENDER YELLOW BILL, MUCH LARGER SIZE

LITTLE BLUE - LONG BLUEISH GRAY BILL, OLIVE LEGS

11. Distance (how measured)? 50 YARDS (ESTIMATE)

12. Optical equipment:  
25X BUSHNELL SCOPE

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):  
HALF HOUR BEFORE SUNSET, SUN AT BACK

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:  
FLORIDA, NEAR ALBION, IOWA LAST SPRING

15. Other observers:

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

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

GOLDEN GUIDE

PETERSON

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 HOURS

Signature

Hank Zuletel

Address: 715 WEST, COLD IOWA 50056

Date: MARCH 27, 1985.

City, State: \_\_\_\_\_



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.