

## BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Ross Goose 2. Number of birds: 3
3. Location Forney's Lake County: Fremont  
 First bird - 1:00 P.M.  
 2nd & 3rd birds - 1:15 to 1:20 P.M.
4. Date: Mar. 25, 1984 5. Time bird seen: 1:15 to 1:20 P.M.
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):  
 Bird 1 - Pinkish - very small bird picked out of large group of Snow Geese landing in big flock already present. I.D. by size compared to birds flying with it.  
 Birds 2 & 3 - These birds first seen by J.S. + S.D. along east edge of large flock. We picked them out and noted general pattern like larger white Snow Geese except bill entirely pink, blue skin clearly visible along back edge of upper mandible.
7. Description of voice, if heard: not separable from 50-60,000 Snow Geese present  
 bird in flight
8. Description of behavior: birds swimming with Snow Geese.  
 birds 2 & 3
9. Habitat - general: Forney's Lake  
 specific: W. end of lake, away from S. shore
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
 Bird 1 - much smaller size separates from Snow Geese flying with it.  
 Birds 2 & 3 - small size, bill entirely pink and blue area at base separates from accompanying Snow Geese.
11. Distance (how measured)? 200 yards - bird 1  
150 yards - birds 2 & 3 - est.
12. Optical equipment: bird 1 - 10x40 binocs  
birds 2 & 3 - zoom  
spect 30x  
40x.
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Clear day, sun  
behind observers
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Had seen twice  
previously in Iowa, Johnson had seen many times.
15. Other observers: Paul Johnson, Lewis, Corey + Brian Blevins  
 birds 2 & 3
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: birds 2 & 3  
Joe Schaefer + Steve Dinsmore,  
they found them first.
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
Checked Robbins + Peterson for details. Head pattern after observation,  
confirmed observation
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 5 min. - notes, 8 hrs. this  
form

Peter C. Peterson

Address: 235 W. McCallan Blvd

Signature

Date: March 25, 1984

City, State: Davenport IA 52803

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.