

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Baird's Sparrow 2. Number: 1
3. Location Desoto Bend N. Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Valley, Iowa
4. Date: April 27, 1976 5. Time Bird seen: 12:50 pm to 12:55 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):
Light sparrow beak, somewhat large; throat white; Necklace of short, very dark and cleanly defined stripes circling breast as in Canada Warbler; Belly white; Flanks streaked with faint, buffy stripes. Nape and sides of crown buff with many thin black stripes. Back also streaked. Wings plainish dull-brown. Side of head buffy with whisker mark showing white between it and cheek. legs light pink or flesh. Shortisk-notched tail-dark. We could not see the orange median stripe as we were almost directly below the bird.
7. Description of voice, if heard:
Not heard
8. Description of behavior: Flew up from plowed field; sat quite still in small sapling for few minutes, preened under wing, flew down into underbush.
9. Habitat - general: River Bottom Land - Nat. Wildlife Refuge
specific: Plowed strip with road on one side, small trees and underbrush bordering it on the other.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
This bird had no yellow above eye as in Savannah. Also the breast stripes were confined to necklace. No noticeable white on tail as in Vespee. No buff on breast as in Lincolns, LeLontes, or Henslows.
11. Distance (how measured)? 5-7 feet - estimate 12. Optical equipment: 8-pr. Binocs
9 pr "
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Very cloudy - No direct sunlight - Bird above and slightly to our left,
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
No experience with Bairds - Very familiar with Savannah, Vespee, Lincolns,
15. Other observers: Mrs. Meier familiar with Henslows.
MRS. MARIAN MEIER
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Consulted immediately with Jim Frates, refuge manager who is very familiar with Bairds on their breeding grounds. He concurred that our description fitted that of a Bairds.
Also Birds of No. America - Robbins et al; Audubon Land Bird Guide
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 hours.

Janya Gray
Signature

Address: 6317 Manderson

Date: April 27, 1976

City, State: Omaha, Ne. 68104

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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