

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- OK/
1. Species Golden Eagle (imm.) 2. Number: 1
3. Location over Univ. of Iowa Macbride Campus, NE of North Liberty, Iowa
4. Date: 3/19/1975 5. Time Bird seen: 2:10 to 2:15 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): Soaring with slightly up-tipped wings, much larger than 4 Red-tailed Hawks nearby, longer wings. Tail relatively large, square. Basic color of plumage rich brown. Base of primaries and secondaries whitish. Proximal half of tail whitish, distal half dark (line of demarcation not quite sharp). When bird tilted, back of head appeared considerably lighter than basic plumage.
7. Description of voice, if heard: no localization
8. Description of behavior: mostly soaring, occasional flaps
9. Habitat - general: open park with deciduous woods and clumps of planted
specific: conifers, between Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain: Much larger than dark-phase Rough-legged Hawk. White on wing the reverse of that in imm. Bald Eagle. Tail larger in relation to body than in Bald Eagle, not mottled but distinctly banded. General plumage lighter than that of imm. Bald Eagle
11. Distance (how measured)? est. 200 ft. 12. Optical equipment: 8x30 binoculars
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): excellent (partly cloudy); bird straight overhead, sun behind light clouds off to SSW
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: adult Golden Eagles seen 1972 in Colorado; imm. Bald Eagle on Mississippi Feb. 1973; adult Bald Eagles
15. Other observers: (2) seen 3/19/75 (one watched when Golden Eagle was spotted)
none
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: Robbins, E. & W. Peterson, Bruun, Eur. Peterson, Heinzel et al., Brown and Amadon. Description based on mental notes taken. Diagnosis confirmed by all books and pictures consulted.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? less than 2 hours

N. S. Halami
Signature

Date: 3/19/1975

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City, State: ↑

Nicholas Halami

Nick

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.

