

FALL 1981

ROBERT E THORNBURG
RR2 PLEASANTVILLE IOWA 50225

DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

1. SPECIES: MERLIN 2. NUMBER: 1
3. LOCATION: NORTH ELK ROCK STATE PARK - RED ROCK RESERVOIR
MARION COUNTY, IOWA
4. DATE: 9 OCT 1981 5. TIME BIRD SEEN: 0900 TO 0905
6. DESCRIPTION OF SIZE, SHAPE, PLUMAGE:

The bird was larger than an American Kestrel, and nearly identical in size to a Common Flicker which was seen in the same tree as the merlin. The bird had a long tail and sharply pointed wings. The beak was yellow as were the eyes. The top of the head was a dusty brown and there was a light tan line above the eye that extended over the bill. I never got a clear look at the back, but it appeared to be a brownish color. The tail was a dark brown and had light colored stripes. The belly and throat were white and had very fine streaks that were dark brown.

7. VOICE: sharp P:K P:K P:K

8. BEHAVIOR: The bird was seen at rest and in flight chasing a Common Flicker. The Flicker appeared to harass the merlin first, and then the merlin chased the Flicker away.

9. HABITAT: GENERAL - large scattered trees along a bluff near the lake front.

: SPECIFIC - dead branches of a Red Oak

10. SIMILAR SPECIES: The American Kestrel is of a similar shape, but is smaller and usually has some reddish plumage on the back or tail. The Sharp-shinned Hawk is similar in size and color especially the immature. The long pointed wings of the merlin differ from the wings of the Sharp-shinned Hawk. The overall posture of the bird did not suggest an accipiter.

11. DISTANCE: 75 yards - estimated
12. OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: 7/10X50 BINOCULARS
13. LIGHT: There was good light on the bird as the sun was behind me and to my left.
14. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SPECIES AND SIMILAR APPEARING SPECIES: The Merlin is a new bird for me, and I have observed the American Kestrel and the Sharp-shinned Hawk in the field before.
15. OTHER OBSERVERS: NONE
16. NOT APPLICABLE
17. NOT APPLICABLE
18. I consulted Birds of North America, Robbins et al. after I had written my field notes. This report was a copy of my field notes, so I referred to the book very little.
19. HOW LONG AFTER OBSERVING THIS BIRD DID YOU FIRST WRITE THIS DESCRIPTION? I wrote my field notes 5 minutes after seeing the bird, and this form was filled out 3 HOURS after seeing the bird.

Robert E Thornburg
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