

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species PRAIRIE FALCON 2. Number: 1
3. Location northern Fremont Co.
4. Date: 10/16/77 5. Time Bird seen: 10am to 10.05am
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):
Large brown falcon - swooped across ^{in front of} my pickup about 3 feet above the road. Black facial mask easily noted. Then flew about 50' above the ground - I turned and followed it south, noting the dark underwings, which were rather extensive, not just in the "armpits". The underparts of the bird were generally brown-looking.
7. Description of voice, if heard: None heard
8. Description of behavior: flew fast across the road, but then when flying higher flew steadily with fairly rapid wingbeats (no gliding seen).
9. Habitat - general: river-bottom farmland
specific: partly harvested corn & bean fields beside West Nishnabotna River.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Immature Peregrine - does not have dark axillars & underwing linings
Adult Peregrine - is grey above, not brown.
Female Am. Kestrel - not as large, no dark axillars
11. Distance (how measured)? Estimated 50' above ground in flight 12. Optical equipment: None
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
perfect sunlight - sun high, not behind bird - bird on east side of road, sun on west.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Breeding prairies in nr Colorado; Peregrine seen in No. Carolina.
15. Other observers: 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:
Above field notes written at time bird seen, transcribed here.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? Immediately (see 18)
- W Ross Wood Address: RR2
Signature
- Date: 10/20/77 City, State: Malvern, Iowa

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.

47670

Date: _____ City, State: _____