

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species BARN OWL (TYTO ALBA) 2. Number: 1
3. Location RANDES FARM, IOWA, MARSHALL CO., EDEN TOWNSHIP, T82N, R20W, SEC 20
4. Date: 29 OCTOBER 1978 5. Time Bird seen: 1105 to 20 SECONDS LATER
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):
UNIFORMLY OBSERVED CHARACTERISTICS INCLUDE: (1) CREAM-COLORED BREAST AND UNDERPARTS, (2) RELATIVELY LARGE HEAD (3) OVAL-SHAPED FACE, (4) TOTAL BODY SIZE SLIGHTLY SMALLER THAN ADULT RED-TAILED HAWK, (5) SHORT NECK, (6) BROWNISH UPPERPARTS
7. Description of voice, if heard: NONE
8. Description of behavior: THE BIRD FLEW DIRECTLY OVERHEAD UPON MY APPROACH AND THEN ANGLED THROUGH SOME OAK TREES TOWARD A PASTURE.
9. Habitat - general: PASTURED FARMLAND SCATTERED WITH WOODLOTS, SEVERAL PONDS, & / MAIN STREAM
specific: PERCHED IN A DEAD COTONWOOD LOCATED ALONG A ROW OF TREES WHICH BOUNDED A MOIST GRASSY TRAVELWAY FOR CATTLE
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
THE BARN OWL IS A FAIRLY DISTINCTIVE SPECIES. ITS UNIFORMLY CREAM BREAST, SHORT NECK, AND OVAL FACE ELIMINATE OTHER SPECIES OF OWLS & HAWKS COMMONLY FOUND IN CENTRAL IOWA FARMLANDS.
11. Distance (how measured)? 8 m (ESTIMATED) 12. Optical equipment: NONE
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): CLEAR SKY; SUNNY DAY; THE BIRD'S FLIGHT AND MY LINE OF SIGHT WERE BOTH PERPENDICULAR TO THE INCIDENT LIGHT.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: I HAVE SEEN BARN OWLS AND COMMON MIDWESTERN RAPTORS IN THE FIELD THROUGHOUT ILLINOIS AND WISCONSIN AS WELL AS MUSEUM SPECIMENS. I HAVE ONLY RECENTLY MOVED TO IOWA.
15. Other observers: NONE
16. Did the others agree with your identification?
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: NONE
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
I USED BOTH THE PETERSON & ROBBINS FIELD GUIDES TO SEARCH FOR SIMILAR APPEARING SPECIES.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 days

Signature

Address: Dept. Animal Ecology, ISU

Date:

31 OCTOBER 1978

City, State:

Ames, 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.

11. Distance (how measured)?
12. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you)?
13. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species?
14. Other observers?
15. Did the others agree with your identification?
16. Other observers who independently identified this bird?
17. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description?
18. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

Address: _____

City, State: _____