

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species White-winged Scoter 2. Number: three

3. Location Little Wall Lake, Hamilton Co., Iowa

4. Date: 10 November 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 10:30 to 10:50 a.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):

At first saw just one bird, later saw the other 2. The one was alone and was obviously a large duck. The body was largely black in color but a white wing patch, a white spot behind the eye, and a white are between the eye and the bill were also easily seen. One of the other two birds matched this while the other one apparently held its wing to cover the white wing patch most of the time. However, this wing patch was seen on that bird when it dove.

Although it was away from other ducks so I couldn't get a direct size comparison, the bird appeared to be larger than the scaup and other ducks that were on the lake.

7. Description of voice, if heard: none heard

8. Description of behavior: swimming and diving. On the first bird, the bird extended the wings away from the body somewhat as it dove, quite different from the dives of most other ducks. At

9. Habitat - general: open water of freshwater lake this time, the white on the wings could be plainly seen.
specific:

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

Black Scoter- these birds had white wing patches
Surf Scoter- no evidence of white patch on back of head, also wing patches
Double-crested Cormorant- wing patches, didn't hold bill up like cormorants do, coloration on head not like cormorant

11. Distance (how measured)? one bird-est. 100 yards, other 2-300 + yards 12. Optical equipment: 20-45X spotting scopes

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): sky basically clear, water calm, not windy, light overhead and had good viewing

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: have seen this species in Alaska numerous times, also have seen all 3 scoters several

15. Other observers: times Mark Dinsmore, Steve Dinsmore, both of whom saw a Surf Scoter with me at this same

16. Did the others agree with your identification? lake at about same time of year last year

17. Other ^{yes} observers who independently identified this bird: none that I know of-I notified others but it was gone by the next day

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Robbins et al (had with me in field), head colors matched those shown for imm female (p 59) but body was more black than dark brown

Since typing this, I heard that ^{George} ~~William~~ Brown + son of Ames saw 2 scoters at Little Wall on 11 Nov. ←

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 days

Jim Dinsmore Steve Dinsmore Mark Dinsmore Address: Dept. Animal Ecology, Iowa State Univ.
Signature

Date: 12 November 1979 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50011

P.P.S. I have had another report of 6 being seen on 12 November at Little Wall and one was shot by a hunter and given to I.S.U. collection. (over)

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.

Date: _____
City, State: _____
Address: _____
Name: _____

I have been a member of the Iowa Ornithologists Union since 1952.
(over)