

Sight record verification

1. Species: Merlin, imm. or ♀ . 2. Number: 1.
3. Location: Swan Lake, Johnson Co., Iowa.
4. September 16, 1976. 5. About 3:30 PM.
- 6; 8. Description. I was looking at 2 Buff-breasted and 2 Baird's Sandpipers on the mudflats constituting the E shore of Swan Lake, a shallow pond about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile across. Suddenly a bird that, from the corner of the eye, reminded me of a Mourning Dove, flew across W to E, about 40 feet over the ground and 50 feet ahead of me. It flew with powerful strokes in an unerringly direct way, with the greatest speed I had witnessed in any bird. As I raised my binoculars, it was due S of me, and the falcon-like wings, pointed and with a crook at the wrist, were plain, as was the longish, square tail. The bird seemed larger (but not much) than a Kestrel, and was banked a little bit towards me. It was dusky brown on the back, with no discernible facial pattern, and certainly no rufous on back or tail. There seemed little contrast between back and belly, but because of the angle of view and the tremendously fast flight I could not make out central streakings, nor did I see through the tail and discern a banding pattern. The bird was silent.
9. Habitat: Swan L. is 1 mile south from the Cornville Reservoir. The bird was flying over the lake, the bordering mudflats and disappeared

within seconds over an adjoining cornfield, continuing its rectilinear, unswerving flight.

10. In spite of the first subconscious "gestalt" impression of a Mourning Dove approaching, the square tail, lacking white, falcon wings and greater size rule this one out. The bird seen was definitely too small to be a Peregrine, and had ~~not~~ moustache. It did not have the distinctive facial pattern of the familiar Kestrel either, nor the rufous back and/or wings and tail; it was a dusky bird, not the way Kestrels look to me; nor have I ever seen a Kestrel flying with such blinding speed and so "purposefully".
11. Distance: See 6.-8. Estimated.
12. Optical equipment: 7X35 Leitz Trinoid.
13. Light etc.: Partly cloudy, sun behind clouds to the SW. ~~from~~. When bird was in the binocular field for a few seconds, it was due S of me.
14. I have seen flying Merlins in Bermuda, Sept. 1970, a ♂ perched on a rock in Red Rocks Park near Denver, Nov. 1972, and an apparent immature perched on a wire fence at leisure on Padre Island, Texas, Dec. Nov. 1974. I am quite familiar with Am. Kestrels and have seen 1 Peregrine at Morro Bay, Calif., March 1975.
- 15.-17. No other observers.
18. Literature consulted: All standard American and European guides. Also ~~Wear~~ Brown and Amadon, in which Eckelberry's illustration of a ♀ Merlin

best matched that of bird seen (in coloration)
of all pictures seen. Description, however, was
not influenced by these readings.

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