

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- very dubious?*
- Species GOSHAWK (Accipiter gentilis) 2. Number: ONE
 - Location BROOKSIDE PARK, AMES, IOWA
 - Date: MAY 9, 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 8:30 AM to 8:32 AM
 - 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): FAIRLY LARGE (20" LONG) ACCIPITER TYPE. GRAY BREAST, WINGS, WITH SLIGHT BANDING IN TAIL (NOT TOO DESCRIPTIVE THOUGH). MINUTE DARK SHORT LATERAL BREAST LINES WERE NOTED. DARKISH EYE PATCH? ALSO VIEWED.
Why not ♀ Cooper's?
 - Description of voice, if heard: NONE
 - Description of behavior: ACCIPITER TYPE FLIGHT, GLIDING
 - Habitat - general: WOODED, SQUAW CREEK, PARK AREA.
specific: PARK LOCATED EAST OF ISU CAMPUS NEXT TO URBAN AREA.
 - Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain: VERY DESCRIPTIVE SPECIES, EASILY TOLD FROM MARSH HAWK AND OTHER BUTEO TYPE HAWKS.
 - Distance (how measured)? 30 YARDS (ESTIMATED) 12. Optical equipment: 6X30 BINOCULARS
 - Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): CLOUDY, SUNNY DAY - SUN 90° TO LEFT OF HAWK, PLENTY OF LIGHT ON THE SPECIES.
 - Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: ONE OTHER TIME SAW COOPERS HAWK ALSO.
 - Other observers: 3 OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ORNITHOLOGY LAB.
 - Did the others agree with your identification? YES.
 - Other observers who independently identified this bird: 1 OTHER (NAMES AVAILABLE)
 - Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
ROBBINS et al. FIELD GUIDE. } GOOD EXAMPLES
AUDUBON FIELD GUIDES.
 - How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 1 1/2 HOURS.
- David Franklin Webster* Address: 1402 CRESCENT, AMES IA.
Signature
Date: 5/9/79 City, State: AMES, IOWA 50010

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.