

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Greater Scaup 2. Number of birds: 3-(2♂, 1♀)
3. Location Goose Lake, County: Clinton
4. Date: 10 May, 1984 5. Time bird seen: 9:30 AM to 9:50 AM CDT
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):
 ♀ Exhibited prominent spot of light brown to whitish behind and slightly below eye. This caused us to carefully examine head shape of males which was very rounded. Heads held very erect when swimming, heavy black nail on end of bills. When birds finally flew a long white wing stripe extending to near tip of wing noted in all three birds.
7. Description of voice, if heard: silent
8. Description of behavior: Feeding actively, swimming, finally flew.
9. Habitat - general: marshy lake
 specific: N. side of Goose Lake, seen from dike.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Lesser Scaup - eliminated by head shape, heavy nail on end of bill, whitish marking on head of female + wing stripe extending nearly to end of wing.
11. Distance (how measured)? 200' est. 12. Optical equipment: 10x binocs, 25-45x scope on tripod.
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Partly cloudy, sun (light source) behind observers, sun not out during period of observation.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Have seen regularly
15. Other observers: Larry Linder
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: none to my knowledge
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Nat. Geographic guide consulted during observation to confirm female characteristics.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 10 min.

Peter C. Peterson Address: 235 McClellan Blvd
 Signature

Date: May 10, 1984 City, State: Davenport, IA. 52803

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.

Address: _____
City, State: _____