

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Merlin How many? 1Location? Grammer Grove Co. Park - (Marshall Co.)Type of habitat? Riverbottom Woods with open areasWhen? date(s): May 3, 1987 time: 4:45 to 5:40 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Liscomb, Iowaothers with you: Beth Proescholdtothers before or after you: none

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

We were in the open area before the swamp loop when we saw a small falcon swoop by and head for the swamp. To our great delight we saw it had landed in the top of a dead tree. We first saw it 120 yards away, moved up to 100 yards away, later to 60 yards away to tree and 70 yards to the bird. After a while I circled around so Mom and I were on opposite sides and I was 35 yards to the tree and 40 yards from the bird. The Merlin was in a tree 30 yards high. It was cloudy and overcast and visibility was rather poor. The bird was brown-backed and streaked on its breast. It had a compact, solid look like a Kestrel and its tail was just shortly longer than the folded tips of its wings. When I was the closest to the bird and as it was preening, I saw its pointed wing tips well. On the underside of its tail I saw barring with a dark terminal-tip effect. As it was
(more on Back)

Similar species and how eliminated: Sharpshinned Hawk has accipiter shape and a longer tail look. A Kestrel is smaller and has a very definite mustached face pattern.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Poor visibility - cloudy and overcast. Distances estimated. 8X30 Binocs.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen some merlins and many sharpshins and Kestrels.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? up to 5 hours this form completed? May 24, 1987

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

What species? Merlin
 How many? 1
 Location? Stromer Grove @ Park - (Marshall Co.)
 Type of habitat? Riverbottom woods with open areas
 When? date(s): May 3, 1987 time: 4:45 to 5:40 p.m.
 Who? your name and address: Mark Proscelbt, Liscomb, Iowa
 Others with you: Beth Proscelbt
 Other before or after you: None

perched, its tail was not long like an accipiter. It preened off and on and looked around. A crow bombed it several times. I got very close to it at the end and wanted to get a close look and flush it to see its shape one more time. It seemed unconcerned as I got close. Finally, I started whistling and eventually it darted off in quick, fluttery flight. I got a peek at falcon shape and not accipiter shape. I couldn't see a moustache-look even though I tried hard to see it. We heard it twice give a quick, short "Ki Ki Ki Ki Ki" call or something like that. It was fluffed up at times and had a damp-look at times. It definitely wasn't a Kestrel. We debated whether it could be a sharpshin while we were watching it and were certain that it was a Merlin and not a sharpshin. It had yellow feet and a short bill. It used its talons to scratch itself off and on. Bent says, "In April or May, when the bird is less than a year old, the molt into the adult plumage begins; the body plumage is molted first and the wings and tail later." So we saw a female Merlin or maybe a 1st year bird that hadn't molted into adult plumage yet.