

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species black-legged Kittiwake 2. Number: 1

3. Location Coralville Reservoir, N. of Iowa City IA

4. Date: _____ 5. Time Bird seen: 6 PM to ~6:30 (EST)

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):

size: about $1\frac{1}{2} \times$ the size of the Bonaparte's gulls with which it associated
proportions similar to Bonaparte's except that the head, neck, + bill were proportionally larger in the size of the bird. Sides, chest, throat, crown, nape white. Face white with a black spot, elongated vertically, behind + above the eye. a black collar extended across the back of the base of the neck. (over)

7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard

8. Description of behavior: Swimming with a flock of 6 Bonaparte's gulls. Several times was observed to jab at one of them with its bill.

9. Habitat - general: _____
specific: Artificial lake - at this point ca. 1/2 mile wide.
Banks here largely forested

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

Combination of white crown, neck collar, ~~and wings~~ (larger than Bonaparte's) rules out Franklin's (crown color, mantle color); Little gull has the collar but is smaller than Bonaparte's. ~~has~~ has dark crown;

11. Distance (how measured)? 150-200 yds (est) 12. Optical equipment: 7x35, 8x32 binocs, 25x60 scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

just at sunset but light directly behind observers

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

have seen this sp many times (Mass, Wash. State) also have seen little, bl-headed, Bonapartes, Franklin's, Laughing, Sabine's.

15. Other observers: Carol Newton (bird also seen by N Halmi, R DeCoster, L Serborsek, W. Nelson)

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: yes N Halmi

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

notes made on spot before consulting E. Peterson, Robbins et al did not affect description.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? field notes made immediately - this transcribed 2 days later.

Signature

Date: _____ City, State: _____

M. Newton

(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.

⑥ mantle light grey. wingtips (primaries) black, bordered with a light stripe (probably due to tips of secondaries). Bill black. legs not observed.

att. is copy of a (bad) drawing made in the field.

⑩ ad. Sabine's lacks 'collar', imm has dark cream; black headed + bonapartes lack neck collar.

M. Newton