

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Golden Eagle 2. Number: 1(one)
3. Location 4.9 mi west of jct. of F20 and W48 in Johnson Co. Iowa
The bird was in trees between F20 and the Iowa River bed.
4. Date: Feb. 19, 1978 5. Time Bird seen: 0945 to 1000
(time very approximate)
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): ~~Please see attached sheet.~~
Diagnostic features, included its large size; twice as long as Common Crows which briefly perched in the same tree as the eagle. Generally a dark brown to blackish brown bird, with golden feathers extending from the crown to the nape. The tail was whitish with a broad dark terminal band on both top and bottom. The other light areas were white patches at the base of the primaries, and these areas were visible both on the upper and lower wing surfaces. The legs were feathered "to the toes". The bill was yellow at its base, becoming dark beyond the nostril holes.
7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard.
8. Description of behavior: Perched in tree, alternating between looking at us and scanning the ground. We later noticed a rabbit path well beaten
9. Habitat - ~~general~~ into the snow beneath the tree the eagle had perched in.
specific: The bird was perched on the north edge of a stand of trees bordering the Iowa River. Snow covered cornfields were n. of trees.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Dark phased rough-legged hawk lacks the white wing patches on upper wing surface and is not twice the length of common crow. Also usually ~~has~~ has dark upper tail surface. Immature Bald Eagle lacks prominent white wing patches and base of bill not yellow.
11. Distance (how measured)? about 70 yards at closest. (paced to tree) 12. Optical equipment: 8X binoc. and 20-45 Bushnell scope.
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Bright sunshine on snowy field. Sun almost directly over left shoulder.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Immature and adult Golden Eagles seen 5 times in Calif. 1973-75. Numbers of im. Bald Eagles seen near Davenport, Ia.,
15. Other observers:
Michael Newlon, Iowa City, Iowa
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:
I looked at Robbins et. al., Birds of North America, mostly to check the identification of the bill, which I had not had a good look at on previous Golden Eagles.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

The description was written when I got home, approximately 2 p.m. on

Richard J. DeCoster
Signature

Address: 628 Reno St.

Feb., 19.

Date: 1 March 1978.

City, State: Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Same as seen and documented by Mike Newlon

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.

IV. Other observers who independently identified this bird: none to my knowledge.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description? I looked at Robbins et al.: Birds of North America, mostly to check the identification of the bill, which I had not had a good look at on previous Golden Eagles.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? The description was written when I got home, approximately 2 a.m. on Feb. 19.

Signature: *Michael J. Newton*
Address: 428 Park St
City, State: Iowa City, Iowa 52242
Date: March 1978
Zone as seen and documented by Michael Newton