ILLINOIS

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Prairie Falcon 2. Number: 1

3. Location Forney's Lake, Fremont Co.

4. Date: Mar. 25, 1984 5. Time Bird seen: 12:23 P.M. to 12:25 P.M.

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):
Large raptor, pointed wings, long tail. Grey to greyish brown below, body lighter toward throat, tail banded dark grey over light. Underwing light greyish brown, darker to tip with black along sides of body and extending slightly into wing. Fore edge of wing seemed lighter than rest of wing.

7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard

8. Description of behavior: Flying directly north - gliding, just east of our position.

9. Habitat - general: Missouri River Valley
specific: Forney's Lake and adjacent Fields

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Peregrine Falcon - black along base of wing and light fore edge eliminate
Merlin - same plus size

11. Distance (how measured)? 400 yards est. - judged by length of time bird in view, angle when well to north.

12. Optical equipment: 7X, 10X + 15X binocs, 20X guntrad scope

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Sun to observers right and behind. Clear sky

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: all obs. have seen this bird on several occasions in the West.

15. Other observers: Lewis, Corey & Brian Blevins.

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 made my notes before I looked at the guides which the other observers were examining. Checked them with Robbins, Peterson, Geo. guide & Master guide.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? notes made just after observation, this sheet completed 8½ hours later

Peter C Peterson
Signature

Address: 235 McClellan Blvd.

Date: Mar. 25, 1984

City, State: Davenport, IA 52803

(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.