

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Red-shouldered Hawk 2. Number: 1
 3. Location South end of Union Slough Refuge about 1/8 m. W of Deer Meadow Picnic Area
 4. Date: April 30, 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 2:00 PM to 2:05
 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):
Bird was sitting on fence post along road. Did not fly as we slowly drove by. Rusty shoulder patches were clearly evident. Stopped car and backed up for better view. Hawk flew a short distance to a tree and shoulder patches and tail stripes were clearly seen. After hawk landed in tree, ~~the~~ light streaking on belly was seen.
 7. Description of voice, if heard:
Did not call.
 8. Description of behavior:
See above. After sitting in tree for 2-3 minutes, hawk flew off towards woods.
 9. Habitat - general: Refuge is large marshy wetland area surrounded by intensive farming area.
specific: South end of refuge has extensive wooded area along Buffalo Creek. Trees mostly box elder, Maple and Cottonwood.
 10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Diagnostic characteristics were seen up close with binoculars. Definitely not a red-tail or broad-wing.
 11. Distance (how measured)? 50 feet (Estimated 1/2 width of county road right-of-way) 12. Optical equipment: 7x35 Binoculars
 13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Cloudy but relatively bright day.
 14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Have observed red-shouldered hawk and other hawks for 30 years in many parts of the country
 15. Other observers:
Jim Kline, Asst. Refuge Manager and Glenn Welp
 16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
 17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
Glenn Welp
 18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
None
 19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 1 week
- Erwin E. Klaas Address: Iowa Coop. Wildlife Res. Unit
Signature Iowa State Univ.
Date: May 7, 1979 City, State: Ames

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.

11. Distance (how measured)? *Estimated 1/2 mile at 20 feet*

12. Light (day, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you)? *7:30 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.*

13. Cloudy but relatively bright day

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species? *Have observed red-shouldered and other hawks for 20 years in many parts of the country*

15. Other observers? *Tom King, that I saw at ... and Glenn Wolf*

16. Did the others agree with your identification? *Yes*

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird? *Glenn Wolf*

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description? *None*

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? *1 week*

Address: *Tom King, 1111 S. ...*

City, State: *Ames, Iowa*

Date: *July 7 1977*