

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species?Prairie Falcon

How Many?1

Location?Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co.-near north Elk Rock State Park

Habitat?perched in dead trees over ice

Date?6 Feb 1988

Time?4:18-5:05 p.m.

Observers Name and address:Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50010

Others who saw bird:Bart Ballard, Fairfax

Description of bird:At approximately 4:15 p.m., we pulled into a boat ramp on the north side of Red Rock Reservoir to scan the lake for waterfowl, eagles, etc. After a couple of minutes of looking, I noticed a bird perched on a dead stump over the lake about one mile to the west of where we were. It was immediately obvious that the bird was a hawk, and from the long, tapered body, long tail, and smallish head we concluded that the bird was a falcon. But which one? The bird looked too big for a Merlin or kestrel, so we surmised the bird was either a Prairie or Peregrine Falcon or a Gyrfalcon. We then hiked west along the lakeshore in order to get a closer look at the bird. At 4:45 p.m., we stopped at a point directly north of the bird, but we were still unable to identify the bird. As we began walking further west, the bird flew. In flight, we easily identified the bird as a Prairie Falcon on the basis of the dark axillaries. The rest of the birds' underparts appeared conspicuously white compared to the dark axillaries. The bird flew about one half mile to the northwest and landed in a dead tree along the north shore of the lake. We then approached to within 100 yards and watched the bird for about ten minutes. Since the bird was facing us, we got a good look at the underparts and head. The underparts were entirely white except for some dark spots on the sides of the breast and along the flanks. The throat and side of the face were light colored except for a dark whisker and a dark spot behind the eye. The crown was light brown and lighter colored than the whisker mark. As we were about to leave, the bird suddenly flew to the west. In flight, the tail had numerous dark bands alternating with lighter, brownish bands. The tail appeared browner than the rest of the bird. The back and upper surface of the wings were light gray and not as brown as the tail.

Similar species and how eliminated:The large size eliminates American Kestrel and Merlin. The black axillaries, dark whisker, and light crown eliminate Peregrine Falcon and Gyrfalcon.

Viewing conditions and equipment:Viewing conditions were o.k. with the sun to one side and the sky clear. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 100 yards. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope and Nikon 8x23 binoculars.

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous Merlins and Peregrine Falcons in Iowa, as well as two other Prairie Falcons.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? notes written immediately after sighting

How long before this form was completed? written on 8 Feb 1988