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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

	BIRDS. VERIFIING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.
1.	Species Cinnamon Teal 2. Number: 2 males
3.	Location Big Creek Lake, Polk County.
	Late afternoon, about:
4.	Date: 9-7-80 (Sept. 7th) 5. Time Bird seen: 3:00 to 3:15
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): Length of each bird was about 11 to 12 inches; this length did not differ from the estimated lengths of Bluewinged Teal that were in the same area. Bill: dark; head: dark brown, showing a gradation to a rusty hue; breast and belly: bright chestnut color was obvious and extended from lower neck to the near the undertail coverts; wing: blue forward edge of the wing was highly visible while the bird was standing and when it was in flight. Green was seen in the wing speculum when the birds were in flight.
7.	Description of voice, if heard: Voice not heard.
	Description of behavior:Birds were standing on a mudflat when observed; at times they would preen themselves. One male kept constant company with a female teal. Habitat - general:Shallow lake area with much emergent vegetation. specific:Mudflat near the edge of the lake.
10.	Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6.7 & 8, Explain: Green-winged Teal: Blue was seen in the forward edge of the wing when the birds described above were observed. Chestnut coloration also eliminates the Green-winged Teal. Head markings of male Green-winged Teal were not seen. Blue-winged Teal: Chestnut color on breast and lack of a white face mark elimi- Distance (how measured)? nate the Blue-winged Teal. 12. Optical equipment: 50 yards (estimated by sight). Bushnell Spacemaster 25x
14. 15.	Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Sky was clear; sun was in back of us and shone directly on the bird; viewing conditions excellent. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: No previous experience with this species. I have banded Blue-and Green-winged Teal in Minnesota Other observers: Hank Zaletel and Paul Marsching Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17.	Other observers who independently identified this bird: Dick and Pauline Mooney.
18.	Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Golden Field Guide to North American Birds Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America by Frank C. Bellrose. All three books supported the above description.
	How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 21 hours.
64	John C. Robinson Address: P.O. Box 1015 Welch Ave. Station
Dat	te: September 7, 1980 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50010

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.

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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.

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[And C. Roll toward] Address: P.O. Box 1015 Welch ave. Station

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