

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- Species Glaucous Gull 2. Number: 2
3. Location Lock & Dam #15, Davenport
4. Date: Jan. 4, 1981 5. Time Bird seen: 9:10 A.M. to 9:45 A.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):
Birds in 2nd year plumage. O F F white coloration overall. One larger than nearby Herring Gulls, one about the same size. Bill dark tipped, clear line of demarcation to light base (grey-brown). Legs pinkish. Photographed with 500mm. lens - color slide film. Flew with slower wing beat than Herring, also heavier bodied.
7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard.
8. Description of behavior: Sleeping on ice - awoke & took flight. One returned to ice.
9. Habitat - general: Miss. River ice
specific: just above Govt. bridge, Obs. from Corps. of Engrs. obs. deck - inside bldg thru plate glass.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Iceland Gull. - one bird too large, ^{both showed} Bill tip too distinct, head shape too flat, Flight with slower wing beat, heavy bodied.
11. Distance (how measured)? 100 yds. - est. 12. Optical equipment: Zoom scope, used at 30-50X 60 10X40 Binocs.
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
light from behind obs. over our right shoulder - bright sunny day.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Have seen many times along Miss. R.
15. Other observers: Marylou Peteresen, Alan Hahn, Tim Dwyer
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified ^{one of} these birds: T. H. Kent, Lewis Blevins
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Janssen - what is a Glaucous or Iceland Gull? Loon. 51:115-117, 1979
Birds of Europe - Braun & Singer, The Birds of Britain & Europe - Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow. To rule out Iceland Gull positively. Hahn & Dwyer had suspected Iceland on 1/3/81.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 30 min.

Peter C. Peteresen
Signature

Address: 235 McClellan Blvd

Date: Jan 4, 1981

City, State: Davenport, IA 52803

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.