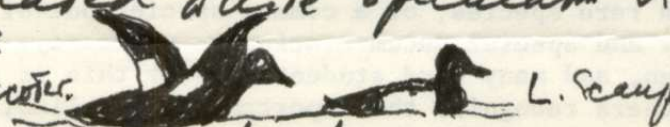


Middlewestern Prairie Region
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- Species White-winged Scoter 2. Number: 3
- Location Near Sandy Beach area of Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co.
- Date: Oct. 22, 1977 5. Time Bird seen: 2:30-~~2:40~~ and 3:20-3:35 PM
- 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): ducks with large rads of L. Scaups; larger size unigenivocal; sloping profile seen; all black, except for white spot around eye and sharply demarcated white speculum visible when birds flapped wings

- Description of voice, if heard: not heard
- Description of behavior: swam with L. Scaups, occasionally flapping wings
- Habitat - general: deep area of reservoir - water level fairly high
specific:
- Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain: other scoters eliminated by white on speculum; no other duck virtually black all over; many coots nearby - white bill obvious, also trailing edge of white on flapping wings and small size
- Distance (how measured)? est. 1000 m from S, 300 m from NE (later time) 12. Optical equipment: 20-45x Bushnell zoom scope
- Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): complete, medium high overcast, light rain; no sun; visibility unlimited
- Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: last seen in area in March 1977 by me and many others; familiar with all other scoters
- Other observers: none (G.T. Kent saw 2 scoters at 8:30 AM at the same place. Judged to be 57 White-winged (seen in flight too))
- Did the others agree with your identification? yes
- Other observers who independently identified this bird: none
- Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: none
- How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? Oct. 22 / 4:40-4:45 PM

W. H. Salvi
Signature

Address: R #6

Date: Oct. 22, 1977

City, State: Iowa City, IA 52240

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.