

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Merlin

Number: 1 female

Date: 31 Jan 1991

Time: 3:47-3:54 p.m.

Location: Ames, Story Co.

Observer(s): Stephen J. Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA

Other observer(s): none

Description of bird(s): I first observed bird as it flew over me and landed in a nearby tree. In flight, the pale color of the bird and its stocky body and pointed wings reminded me of a Rock Dove. The mantle and wings were a pale beige color, with some white scalloping on the mantle. The underwing was whitish-no black axillars. The head was also pale brown with some darker brown streaking on the crown. The cheek was unmarked (i.e. no obvious whisker marks). The underparts were white with heavy, dark brown streaks running the length of the bird, most noticeably on the flanks. The undertail coverts were white. The tail was also brown with numerous narrow white bands on the distal two thirds of the tail. The tail was proportionately long compared to the overall length of the bird. The legs had a yellow tint to them.

Of all of the Merlins I have seen in Iowa, this bird was by far the palest. The bird more closely resembled a Prairie Falcon as far as color was concerned. Based on this pale appearance, I concluded that the bird belonged to the Richardson's subspecies of Merlin, a pale form more common in western U.S., but also likely in Iowa, especially in winter.

Similar species and how eliminated: Falcon-like appearance eliminates other raptors. The smaller size, white axillars, and tail pattern eliminates other falcons.

Optical equipment and viewing conditions: Good viewing with sun behind me. Estimated viewing distance was 50 feet. I used Bausch and Lomb 7x35 binoculars.

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

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous Merlins in Iowa and elsewhere, including several pale Merlins in Nebraska and Idaho.

How long before field notes written? none written