

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION
OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

Species: Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*) Number: I

Location: Three miles south of Pisgah, Harrison County, Iowa.

Date: February 7, 1979 Time bird seen: 3:20 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

The size of the bird was about that of a hen Ring-necked Pheasant. Shape of the bird in general was chicken-like, with similiar grouse-like bill and feet. Bill color was dark, feet light brownish-gray, eye color was sandy brown. General color of head was buffy, underparts were light, with distinct heavy barring which were dark brown in color. Upperparts were dark with light markings. Head: buffy eye ring, buffy cheek, mottled barring on head. Throat was buffy. A dark malar mark, dark line behind eye, a dark ring surrounding the buffy eye ring. Also crown and nape dark contrasting with buffy head colors. Light spots on wing coverts and back formed broken light line markings. Primary feathers were mostly dark brown with light spots on fore part of feathers. The pinnae featers were light colred striped with black and dark brown. In flight the bird's flight-sail style was much like a pheasant. The short, dark, round tail contrasted with the body. Rump was light and barred as well. No bare areas of skin were observed.

Behavior: Bird was first found perched 12 feet off ground in a Box Elder tree and was possibelely feeding on the seeds. It sat rather still and was unafraid of passing cars. We finally flushed the bird by approaching within 20 feet, it then flapped and glided for a distance of under a quarter mile.

Similiar species: The close reative the Lesser Prairie Chicken is smaller, paler and lacks distinct markings. It is also rare , and has never occurred in Iowa.

Distance: At closest range we got to within 25 feet of the perched bird,, estimated distance that we observed the bird at length through binoculars was about 30 feet.

Light: Light was at our backs as we viewed the bird in front of us, since the sky was overcast lighting was not the best for observation but adequate for seeing needed field marks.

I have no previous experience with live birds but have seen museum skins. Darwin Koenig also saw the bird and agreed with the identification. Robbin's field guide was consulted at time of sighting. Detailed notes were taken at time of sighting and used to write this documentation.

Joe Schaufembuel, March 12, 1979
St. Lucas, Ia.
52166