

Merlin -- Documentation

On March 27 I found a Merlin sitting near the top of a dead tree along the north side of county road B-40 about 4 miles west of Sioux Center (Sioux Co). I first noticed and recognized the bird as I was driving eastwards towards Sioux Center. There were many migrating Kestrels in the area, but I recognized this bird at once as a Merlin because of its distinctively striped breast (it was facing the road). I turned the car around and drove slowly back, westwards. The bird permitted me to approach to within 20 yards. The light was behind me, and I could see the bird very clearly. I already mentioned the striped (lengthwise) underparts. The tail was clearly banded. Size about of a Kestrel, but no distinctive Kestrel-like head markings and no rufous on back and tail. The bird's upperparts were a light dusky brownish. This led me to conclude that the bird was a female of the F. c. richardsoni race.

By now I am quite familiar with the Merlin. I see them nearly every year. In fact, a few years ago one appeared in my yard in Sioux Center. I have also seen the Merlin in California, and just a month ago I saw two of them in southern Alberta. I rule out Kestrel on basis already indicated above, as well as Sharp-shinned Hawk, since this bird had pointed wings and the breast striping was lengthwise on light background, rather than crosswise on reddish or rusty background.

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