

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

NEWLON

1. Species merlin 2. Number 1

3. Location Dunbar Slough, Greene Co. IA

4. Date: 9-21-80 5. Time Bird Seen: 9 AM to 9:20 AM

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):

Small falcon - large head, long pointed wings, long square tail. about $1\frac{1}{2}x$ length of blue jay. In flight, heavier-bodied and with a deeper wingbeat than kestrel.

Dark brown above, underparts streaked with rufous-brown, breaking up into rufous bars on belly and thighs. Face pale with dark crown and a faint dark eye-line, no other markings. Tail banded with dark and pale brown; bands were wide.

(bird perched in same tree as did the peregrine, ~~the~~ affording a good opportunity for size comparison.)

7. Description of voice, if heard: —

8. Description of behavior: first noticed pursuing small shorebird in tight circles, then flew to top of dying spruce, sat for 15 min, flew off to east. about half an hour later, reappeared, made another pass at the shorebirds.

9. Habitat - general:

specific:
marshy slough surrounded by farmland.

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8. Explain: coloration, lack of strong facial marks, banded tail, eliminates Am. kestrel; size eliminates larger falcons.

11. Distance (how measured)?
50-200 yds (est.)

12. Optical equipment: 8x40 binocs.
25x60 scope.

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
seen at various angles, including sun directly behind observer.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: have seen numerous merlins in VA, MA, WA, and one in Iowa; am familiar with all of the hawks of the southern US.

15. Other observers: C.S. Newton, T. Shires, T. Kent.

16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: —

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

none

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? taken from field notes made on the spot, during/immediately after the obs.

Signature: Michael C. Newton Address: 908 Wales St.

Date: 28 Sept 1980 City, State: Iowa City IA 52240