

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Prairie Falcon; Number: 1

Location: Union Slough N.W.R., Kossuth Co., IA

Date: 29 October 1993; Time: 4:50 to 5:00 p.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: none

Habitat and circumstances: long narrow slough

Description of bird: At the upper end of the slough I saw a small raptor at a high altitude as I was scanning some flying ducks. Later at the road crossing the slough near the National Wildlife Refuge headquarters I saw a large falcon flying and watched it fly into the center of a large, solitary cottonwood tree. As it flew in it spread its wings so that I could see black areas extending from the axillary region toward the elbow. In the tree the bird appeared to have a light head and breast. The distance was too great to see fine details. I saw the bird fly to another position in the tree. After a while, it took off and immediately was dived on by a Northern Harrier. The harrier had longer, more rounded wings and typical harrier flight. The falcon had long pointed wings and straight relatively narrow tail. I would estimate that the wing span was about three-fourths that of the harrier. The birds flew around a bit and seemed to have another dog fight before I lost sight of the falcon.

Voice: Not heard.

Similar species: The underwing markings and apparent light coloration argue against Peregrine Falcon. The date and location are appropriate for Prairie Falcon in Iowa.

Light: Overcast, gray sky; Distance: about 1/4 mile; Optics: 10x binocular, 20x scope. I had the bird in the scope when it flew into and out of the cottonwood.

Previous experience: Fourth sighting for Iowa, more out west.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: 1 hour; Final typing: 2 days.