

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Prairie Falcon; **Number:** 1

Location: between Treynor and Carson on highway 92, Pottawattamie Co., IA

Date: 3 March 1995; **Time:** about noon

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

Others before/with/after: Jim Fuller and Dick Tetrault with me.

Habitat and circumstances: gently rolling hills; small stream with scattered trees.

Description of bird: We were driving east at 55 mph and were approaching a bridge over the stream when a large falcon appeared low over the bridge and flew southwest down the stream. We pulled off as soon as possible, but by the time we could get out of the car the bird had disappeared. I saw a large falcon (long pointed wings, long narrow tail) with strong wing beats. The bird appeared light brown and as it raised its wings I detected a dark bar on the under wing from mid-axilla extending forward toward the bend of the wing. I noted this on at least two wing beats. All of this was with the naked eye. We drove down a gravel road and check the trees for a mile to the southwest, but never saw the bird again.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: The falcon shape was clear to us. The bird was flying directly into a strong southwest wind, but I don't think an accipiter's wing could be that pointed even in a strong wind. The bird was too large and plain to be a kestrel and the flight pattern and behavior were unlike any of the many kestrels seen that day. The light color and open farmland habitat favor Prairie over Peregrine. A Merlin would be smaller and darker. However, I would not have identified this bird as to species with out seeing the underwing pattern.

Any one have reservations?: Even though this was only a brief sighting, we all agreed on the identification.

Light: sun to our right; **Distance:** 30-50 yards (estimate) -- we were just short of the bridge as the bird flew down stream to our right. **Optics:** none.

Previous experience: have seen a number in various states.

References before/after viewing: none.

Time of notes: none; **Final typing:** 1 day.