

D O C U M E N T A T I O N

Merlin --

On Wednesday, September 7, 1994, my wife and I were hiking around the South Pits just south of Hawarden in western Sioux County. It was about 11:00 a.m. It was a clear, sunny day, with little wind. About halfway around the ponds I noticed two birds sitting in a bare tree. One of them was a Mourning Dove. The other was a small falcon. My first thought was that I was looking at a Kestrel. A second look, however, immediately revealed the absence of the facial markings characteristic of a Kestrel. So I approached the bird more closely, and was able to come within about 50 feet or so. The light was to the side, but with my 9x25 binoculars I could clearly see the features of this bird: a brownish vertically streaked breast, only a slight eyeline on an otherwise quite unmarked face, a slaty-gray back, and barred tail. After about ten minutes or so of close observation, the bird flew off, displaying its pointed wings, slaty-gray upperparts (no rusty) and banded tail. The bird also called: a rapid series of ki-ki-ki-ki notes! This is the first time I have ever heard a Merlin call.

The Merlin has become a regular migrant in northwest Iowa, also wintering occasionally. We see them virtually every year. September 7, however, is a very early date. According to Dinsmore e.a. Iowa Birds, this observation would constitute the third earliest fall record.

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