

1/27/82

Middlewestern Prairie Region
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Scissor-Tailed ~~Catbird~~ Flycatcher 2. Number: One

3. Location Marshall County--Timber Creek Township

4. Date: August 29, 1981 5. Time Bird seen: 12:30 to 1:30 to P.M.

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):

Nearly the body size of a kingbird but with more delicate features and a very much longer forked tail. Body color was a very soft light gray. Wings were much darker which gave them a real contrast against the body color. It had light spots along the outer edge of the underside of the tail. The tail was very long and narrow. The end of the tail was open (forked). When it would fly I could see a very light but yet bright red against its gray body. I think this color was against its body but under its wings.

7. Description of voice, if heard:
None

8. Description of behavior:
It was quite tame. It would sit on its perch and fly out after a bug and then return to its perch in a typical flycatcher fashion.

9. Habitat - general:--Perched on a fencepost next to a cornfield. Also in our specific: backyard on our house serviceline.

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

I've never seen a bird that is similar in appearance.

11. Distance (how measured)? Estimated 25 feet away on fencepost, and about 12 feet away from our service line which we watched from our bedroom window. 12. Optical equipment: None

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
It was a sunny day with the sun directly overhead.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
None

15. Other observers:
Wife and daughter.

16. Did the others agree with your identification?
Yes.

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
None.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
FIELDGUIDE TO THE BIRDS by Peterson.
Book confirmed my identification.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 months.

Philip Grabenbauer Address: Route 4, Marshalltown, Iowa 50150
Signature

Date: December 1, 1981 City, State: Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

Sent in by Carl Kuntz 1/25/82

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, there really is no need to describe your observations in writing. But, if you have seen something unusual and want to share this experience with others, a written description is essential. It is true your immediate friends who know and respect your ability probably will accept your report without question, but what about those who do not know you, particularly the bird students 100 years from now who cannot know you? Also, what about the habitual skeptics? And most importantly, what about the compilers of regional bird lists who probably will insist that records be scientifically sound? All these critics will investigate your observation not because they assume you are wrong, but merely because they ordinarily expect verification. Whether the individual demanding verification realizes it or not, in doing so, he is employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

If your observation involves a common species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season, verification is not obtained easily and special documentation is necessary. The best documentation is a collected specimen, and many bird students insist this is the only acceptable evidence. However, others recognize the importance and reliability of sight records accumulated by the experienced field observer, and maintain that even extraordinary sight records are acceptable if accompanied by an adequate verifying description.

It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

It should also be pointed out that with the great photographic equipment now available, species identification from photographs are possible. Such species documentation are highly desirable and should be sent to the state editors or to large museums.

My first glimpse of this bird was when it was flying and the thought that came thru my mind was it was a bird that was carrying a long, narrow rag that was trailing behind it....like a robin will do when it is building its nest.

Its flight pattern rather reminded me of a parakeet, I'm not really sure why but I think it was the way it would flutter when getting an insect.

Once when it was flying its body turned at about a 90 degree angle and then its tail followed.

I have been interested in birds for about 45 years and after seeing this bird I feel I have had a fulfillment far beyond any expectation. It was the most beautiful bird I had ever seen. The colors were so delicate.

I took a picture of it with my daughter's Instamatic camera when it was sitting on the fencepost. I would be willing to show any skeptic the picture and the spot where it was taken. The bird in the picture is quite small and the tail cannot be seen but you can see its body shape and body color which is unmistakable. I could have another copy of the picture made if you would like to see it for verification.

How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 2 months.
Address: _____
City, State: _____
Date: _____