

L ✓

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 2. Number: 1
3. Location 2 miles south of Ames on State Avenue
4. Date: 30 July 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 4:30 to 4:45
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):

Flycatcher (erect posture), about size of kingbird except outer tail feathers much elongated, and about twice length of other tail feathers (about the same as shown for immature in Robbins). Back and head gray except for dark line through eyes. Underparts white with slight wash of yellow in lower belly region. Outer tail feathers appeared dark except much white showed when fanned in flight.
7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard
8. Description of behavior: sitting on telephone wire, flew out to catch insect once, returning to wire
9. Habitat - general: on wire across road, adjacent to farmyard, rest open farmland with a good hedgerow along one side of road
specific:
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Fork-tailed Flycatcher-the bird seen had no evidence of black crown as in Fork-tailed bird leaned over so I could see top of head
11. Distance (how measured)? 30-40 feetm drove right under bird 12. Optical equipment: 6 x 26 binocs
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
sun behind me most of time, good light, drove so could see both front & back of bird
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Have seen this species in Florida and the Fork-tailed in Trinidad
15. Other observers: Mark Dinsmore and David Graham
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: David Graham who has seen the bird in the SW U. S.
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Robbins et al matched plate of immature
Peterson Mexican bird guide did not match plate of Fork-tailed
French Birds of Trinidad & Tobago ditto
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
24 hours

Signature

John J. Dinsmore

Address: Dept of Animal Ecology

Date: 31 July 1979

City, State: Ames, Iowa

Graham first reported to me on 27 July that he had seen the bird for about a week. I could not find it on 29 July but first saw it on 30 July. Since the above was written numerous others have seen it, it has been photographed, a nest with one young was found, and the young banded. (honest) (over)

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.

1. Distance (how measured)? 50-60 feet from bird

2. Light (day, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you)

3. Sun behind or in front of bird, good light, dove so could see both front & back of bird

4. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species

5. Have seen this species in Florida and the York-Island in Trinidad

6. Other observers: Mark Bismore and David Graham

7. Did the others agree with your identification? yes

8. Under observation who independently identified this bird: David Graham who has seen the bird in the U. S.

9. Local illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Robbins et al. matched plate of immature

10. Peterson Mexican bird guide did not match plate of York-Island

11. French Birds of Trinidad & Tobago ditto

12. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 4 hours

13. Address: Dept. of Animal Zoology

14. Date: 31 July 1979

15. Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

16. Graham first reported to me on 17 July that he had seen the bird for about a week. I could not find it on 29 July but first saw it on 30 July. Since the above was written numerous others have seen it, it has been photographed, a nest with one young was found, and the young banded. (honest)