

Gyr Falcon Record Number: 93-22
28 Sep 1993 Classification: A-D
e of Kettleson Hogsback, Dickinson Co., IA
*Schantz, *Clark, *Silcock, *Jackson
*Sinclair; IBL 64:12, 68, Silcock 1994

DOCUMENTATIONS

Tim Schantz, Route 1, Otley 50214
Jane R. Clark, Clive 50325
Ross Silcock, Box 300, Tabor 51653 [2/23/94]
Maridel Jackson, 410 SW Westview Dr., Ankeny 50021
Jim Sinclair, 810 North B Street, Indianola 50125

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:12
Records Committee: IBL 64:68
Silcock, R. 1994. Gyr Falcon in northwestern Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 64:115-116.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Documents were about as good as could be expected for a falcon on the move in that short of viewing time. Lack of facial pattern and lack of underwing marking eliminates Peregrine and Prairie. Gyr Falcon of that plumage is a very nondescript bird. Glad I missed meeting.

A-D, Two factors trouble me about this sighting. First, of course, is the extremely early date, before any Gyrfalcons have been sighted even in Northern Minnesota. Secondly, there seems to have been some early confusion as to size. Would a bird that was ultimately described as Red-tailed Hawk sized (or only slightly smaller than a Canada Goose!) look at a distance like a Northern Harrier or Peregrine Falcon? I was impressed, however, with the excellent descriptions of the flight style which match my own experience with this species. This feature and the lack of facial markings determine my vote. (Just a thought -- did anyone consider this may have been an escaped falconer's bird?)

A-D, Unmarked head and perception of size were the best details of an otherwise almost nondescript species. Some of the most convincing comparison with Peregrine came from Jackson and Clark who had substantial experience with the hacked Peregrines. Uniform underparts and absence of facial markings eliminate Prairie, as did color. The area was perhaps the most likely for a Gyr to show up from a geographical standpoint, and Schantz dispatched concerns about the earliness of the date.

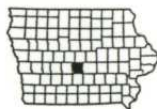
A-D, Eight excellent birders, several with very recent extensive experience with Peregrine Falcons of all ages, all reached the same conclusion on this sighting. The birders had already eliminated Harrier, and Goshawk as the bird approached, and were looking for facial pattern and tail length as bird made its closest approach. The lack of facial pattern, long tail, large size, slow strong steady wing beats, slate gray or blue gray colored underparts, working ducks, and no white undertail coverts convince me that this was a gray phase Gyrfalcon.

A-D, There were a few differences among the documenters in color perception, tail markings, and underwing color. Many good birders, however, were consistent in describing: (1) generally concolor appearance, (2) long tail, (3) lack of facial markings or dark cap, (4) tremendous size as compared to Canada Geese; and (5) flight pattern. Collective experience with Peregrines was helpful. A gray-phase Gyrfalcon is indeed a bird without distinct markings.

FIRST-WINTER CALIFORNIA GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

RANDY PINKSTON

In the early afternoon on 6 December 1993, I was scanning through a distant flock of Ring-billed Gulls above the Saylorville Reservoir dam, Polk County. I was using my Zeiss 10 x 40 binocular and a Bausch & Lomb 30x telescope. My attention was drawn to a dark brown immature gull on the near side of the flock. On the water it seemed no larger than nearby Ring-billed Gulls. Its bill was distinctly bicolored: pinkish at the base, black at the tip. The pale bill base blended with whitish feathering at the front of the face. The remainder of the head and back were a rich chocolate-brown, indeed the darkest parts of the bird except for the black flight feathers and tail. I noticed a dark smudge around the eye at some angles. A pale patch was noted on the nape when it lowered its bill or when the wind blew from behind. The tertials were distinctly bicolored: basal two-thirds solid dark brown, distal third whitish. The wing coverts were paler than the rest of the upperparts and mottled with brown bars parallel to the feather shafts. The underparts were also a paler mottled brown.



In flight, the gull was easily picked out among others by its overall dark brown appearance. Its size was intermediate between Ring-billed and Herring gulls. Proportionately, its body was more slender and its wings longer when compared to Herring Gull. The underwing was entirely dark. The upperwing displayed two dark bars across the secondaries and greater wing coverts.

In comparison to several first-winter Herring Gulls observed that day, this gull's smaller size, darker head and neck relative to the underparts, and bicolored bill were consistent distinguishing characters. I suspected it might be a California Gull, and I reported it to the Iowa Bird Line.

Thirteen days later on the Saylorville Reservoir Christmas Bird Count, Stephen J. Dinsmore identified a first-winter California Gull (presumably the same individual) at Lakeview Recreation Area. Steve's description matches mine, and he noted the following additional distinguishing characters compared to nearby Herring Gulls: lack of a pale "window" at the base of the primaries, a slender bill with no pronounced gonyx, and wing coverts "neatly" barred with dark brown. Steve also noted a dark eye, pink legs, and noticeably pale rump and vent.

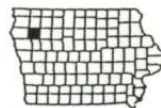
This is the fifth accepted record of California Gull for Iowa, and the second record for Saylorville Reservoir. The first state record was an adult at Credit Island in Scott County on 23-24 November 1989 (Petersen, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:121-122, 1991). The second and third state records occurred in fall 1990. An adult, possibly two, were observed at Saylorville Reservoir in September-October (Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 62:24-25, 1992), and a first-winter bird was present at Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County, on 27-28 October that year (Kent, *Iowa Bird Life* 61:123-124, 1991). The fourth Iowa record was an adult at Carter Lake, Pottawattamie County, on 21-23 November 1993 (Bray, *Iowa Bird Life* 64:82-83, 1994).

12 Hillcrest Dr., Salado, TX 76571-9576

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN IN CHEROKEE COUNTY

DICK BIEMAN

On 4 January 1994, I was driving into Cherokee from the south on U. S. highway 59. It was mid afternoon on a cold day. As I passed the airport I saw a tan-to-brown, large, chunky, short-tailed bird fly up from the shoulder of the road and land about 100 feet away on top of a pile of pushed-up snow. My initial thought was that it could not be a hen pheasant because of the plumpness of the bird and the short tail. A Gray Partridge was eliminated as this bird was much too large.



I pulled into an area where I could get a good look at the bird from about 50 feet away. Using my 7x35 binoculars that I had in my vehicle, I was able to see a heavily barred breast, a yellowish-orange comb over the eye, and feathered tarsi. I took a couple of pictures of the bird and decided to flush it to get a better look at the tail. When the bird flushed, it fanned its tail as it landed about another 50 feet away and showed a dark-brown color on the upper side of the tail. Having seen numerous Sharp-tailed Grouse while on many deer hunts in Wyoming, I was certain that I had a prairie chicken in front of me, but which one?

After consulting several bird guides, I was convinced that I had a male Greater Prairie-Chicken. The Lesser Prairie-Chicken is paler in color and not as boldly marked. The feathers were in excellent condition and showed no wear on the tail or wings. Also, there were no bands on either leg. This further convinced me that I had a wild bird, not an escaped or released bird. I contacted the only exotic animal owners in the area, and they said that they had never had any prairie chickens in their possession.

Over the next few weeks several birders were able to see, photograph, and confirm my sighting. I last saw the bird on 5 April in very suitable habitat four miles south of Cherokee. I also have had a recent report of it being sighted seven miles south of Cherokee on 5 August.

This was my first sighting of this species, the first recent sighting for Cherokee County, and one of only ten or so for the state since 1960.

901 Harris, Cherokee, IA 51012-1546

GYRFALCON IN NORTHWESTERN IOWA

ROSS SILCOCK

The Gyrfalcon is one of Iowa's rarest birds, and so a sighting of one at Kettleon Hogsback Waterfowl Production Area in Dickinson County on 25 September 1993 generated considerable excitement amongst those observers lucky enough to be present.



Around 3:30 p.m. on a clear, sunny day, a group of I.O.U. birders including Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, John Cecil, Jane Clark, Maridel Jackson, Tim Schantz, Jim Sinclair, and I happened to congregate at the Kettleon Hogsback ponds. To improve our viewing conditions, we were at the northwestern corner of the area, on the gravel road. Soon, Tim Schantz noticed a falcon flying into the area from the southwest. His first thought was that it was a Peregrine Falcon, but it soon

93-22

became apparent that this bird was larger, flew with effortless power and grace, and did not have any of the field marks associated with that species. Indeed, this bird was simply overall gray, with no plumage features mentioned by any of the observers. It traversed the area from west to east, harassing waterfowl, turned south, and departed. The entire observation lasted a maximum of about 20 seconds at a minimum of about 100 yards.

Documentations submitted by Clark, Jackson, Schantz, Silcock and Sinclair all noted the lack of features characteristic of Peregrine such as a blackish "helmet" and facial markings, paler underparts, as well as the sheer size of this bird relative to waterfowl present, especially Canada Geese, and its manner of flight, which was not the powerful but slashing flight of a Peregrine, but instead the bird had "a slower and deeper wingbeat" (Clark) and its flight was "not fluttery" (Jackson). It was described as "an absolutely awesome large falcon" (Silcock), and most observers mentioned a long tailed appearance. Clark and Jackson had extensive recent experience with hatched Peregrines in flight and in hand. The bird was gray, not brown, eliminating Prairie, as did the lack of pale underparts and dark axillars, as well as the bird's size.

The I.O.U. Records Committee accepted this record (Kent, *Iowa Bird Life* 64:68, 1994; note that the date of the sighting is incorrect), with slight reservations about the early date of the sighting and the possibility of an escaped falconer's bird. The earliest Minnesota record is 22 September (Schantz). Most falconers would have put a jess on a bird as valuable as a Gyrfalcon.

P. O. Box 300, Tabor, IA 51653

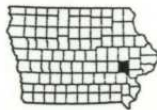
A WINTER RECORD FOR NASHVILLE WARBLER

JIM FULLER

There was a great deal of anticipation on this 19 December 1993, Iowa City Christmas Bird Count as Jim Scheib, John McClure, and I began to search the evergreen trees that border the Hancher Auditorium Parking Lot on the University of Iowa campus. It was at this location that we had discovered two Pine Warblers on the previous year's count. Almost immediately we observed a small bird fly into the top of a Norway Pine. The first impression was a kinglet, but in the binoculars the bird was much too yellow. It was soon apparent that for the second year in a row we had a warbler, this one a Nashville.

This warbler-sized bird had unstreaked lemon-yellow underparts from throat to vent, except for a whitish area between the legs. The side of the face, crown, and nape were all gray. The dark eye was surrounded by a faint white eye ring. The back was brownish-green, as were the wings, and there were no wingbars. The bill was gray, thin, and pointed. The legs were dark. The three warblers with which this species might be confused are Mourning, Connecticut, and MacGillivray's. All three have much more extensive gray on the head and upper breast, including the throat where this bird was yellow. All three also have light legs, whereas this bird's legs were dark.

During mid-morning we watched for some time as the warbler gleaned the evergreen needles as it moved from tree to tree. Others observed it later in the afternoon, but it was not seen on any subsequent day.



This is a first winter record for Nashville Warbler in the state. It is interesting to note that the previous day, no fewer than three birds of this species were found in a single tree on the Omaha, Nebraska, count. Chicago has its "magic hedge" along Lake Michigan where rarities appear with regularity. Maybe Iowa City has its own magic conifers. What will turn up there in 1994?

6 Longview Knoll, RR 6, Iowa City, IA 52240

RING-BILLED GULLS NESTING IN DICKINSON COUNTY

TIM J. WALTZ

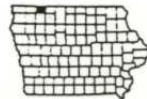
On 16 May 1994, Brian Hellyer and I were seeding some new dikes on the Meinking Wildlife Management Area just east of East Lake Okoboji in Dickinson County. While working, we noticed a large number of Ring-billed Gulls on the far end of the dike across the lower end of one of the smaller wetlands north of the large restored wetland that dominates the complex. When we approached these birds, we discovered 13 nests, 11 in the alfalfa planting adjacent to the dike and 2 among the rocks on the top of the spillway on the dike. We returned to this area on 18 May and checked it more closely. We counted 18 Ring-billed Gull nests; most of them contained two or three eggs but three contained only one egg. All of the nests were on the ground and consisted of a simple cup of dead vegetation (Figure 1). Most of them were in the alfalfa but a few were on the rock that made up the spillway. There were also what appeared to be several new nests that contained no eggs. I remained in the colony only briefly during which time the gulls hovered overhead or perched on the ground nearby. I returned to the area again on 20 May and noticed that one of the nests that previously had contained three eggs was now empty. There was no sign of any egg fragments in that nest. That was the last time that I visited the colony.

On 22 May, Stephen Dinsmore visited this area and found no sign of any of the nests and no gulls present. I assume that some predator, perhaps a raccoon, had visited the colony and preyed upon the nests.

This is the first report of Ring-billed Gulls nesting in Iowa. The number of Ring-billed Gulls reported summering in Iowa has been increasing steadily over the past decade and in recent years, several hundred have summered in the Spirit Lake area (J. J. Dinsmore, pers. commun.). Many of these gulls regularly feed at the Spirit Lake landfill, located immediately to the northeast of the Meinking area and less than half a mile from the site of this colony. The nearest Ring-billed Gull colony is in eastern South Dakota on Bitter Lake near Watertown. This colony is about 130 miles northwest of the Meinking area. Thus this nesting attempt, although unsuccessful, was a significant extension of this species' nesting range.

I appreciate the help of Stephen J. Dinsmore who provided information from his visit to the colony and also information on Ring-billed Gull nesting sites in South Dakota.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources, RR, Box 7244, Spirit Lake, IA 51360



Ring-billed Gull nest, Meinking Marsh, Dickinson Co.

93-22

Iowa Rare Bird Report

Species: Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*)

Observers: Tim Schantz, Ross Silcock, Jim Sinclair, Eugene Armstrong, Eloise Armstrong, John Cecil, Jane Clark, Maridel Jackson

Date of Observation: 25 September 1993

Date of Report: 28 September 1993 (Field marks noted day of observation)

Location: East of Kettleston Hogback entrance, Dickenson Co., Iowa

Optics: Zeiss 10 X 40B

Distance from the bird: as close as approximately 125 yards at one point

Description: Large Falcon, not dwarfed by standing Canada Geese (available for size comparison), Bird lacked any field marks other than the bird was slate gray, long tailed, and large. The coloration of the bird was very uniform, slightly lighter pale gray on the underparts.

Circumstances: Around 3:30 PM Silcock, Sinclair and I pulled off to join the Armstrongs scanning a small wet area where there were waterfowl present. To get better lighting on the birds we repositioned ourselves to the northwest edge of the wetland on a little rise and were joined by Armstrong and company. I noticed a raptor swooping back and forth at an isolated pool to the southwest of the main one. My first impression was that the bird was a Northern Harrier. When I saw the bird through binoculars I immediately recognized the bird as a Falcon. I alerted all observers to the Falcon then noticing the slate blue gray coloration called it a Peregrine. At this point the bird flew across the main wetland roughly 125 yards from our position. In good light I noticed no discernible field marks other than the bird was uniformly slate gray, slightly lighter on the underparts of the body and underwing. Before ever consulting bird guides I noted a long-tailed appearance. As the bird flew over the wetland one could compare its size with standing Canadian Geese. It appeared only slightly smaller! In flight the bird's wingstrokes were smooth and deliberate (much different from the jerky wingbeats of a Peregrine) We watched the bird as it harassed waterfowl then flew off towards the Southwest. We continued birding, not having a field guide with us at the time, we consulted books when we returned to the IOU meeting. I was amazed when Birds of Minnesota, (Green and Janssen) listed a September 22 early date for Southern Minnesota! I feel certain we observed an adult gray phase Gyrfalcon.

How other species are eliminated:

Northern Goshawk- Although Goshawks have been known to show pointed wings, they are never as pointed as a Falcon's. I have seen many Northern Goshawks and jizz alone would rule this one out. I saw no barring on the tail. One of the prime field marks on a Goshawk are the bright white undertail coverts which this bird did not have. The bird in question also lacked a dark crown.

Peregrine Falcon- Size. No dark helmet. Jizz (mentioned above). The bird lacked overall contrast of a Peregrine Falcon. Juveniles would be brown.

Prairie Falcon- Color. Prairies are a brown bird in all plumages. The underwing was uniform with no black axillaries. Habitat. Prairies feed almost exclusively on small mammals.

Discussion-

Upon returning home from the IOU meeting I contacted Kim Eckert of Duluth Minnesota to discuss our recent sighting. When I asked him about the presence of early Gyrfalcons this year in Minnesota he replied, " there had not been any sightings so far this year. However, a late September record of Gyrfalcon in Iowa would not surprise me this year. We have had many early records of wintering species this year." I also asked him about the habitat in which we saw our bird. " I have had many reports of Gyrfalcons harassing waterfowl in the fall in Minnesota.", was his reply.



Tim Schantz
Naturalist

Marion County Conservation Board

Route 1
Otley, Iowa 50214

Cordova Park
Res: 515-627-5935

DOCUMENTATION FORM

What species: Gyrfalcon
How many: 1

Location: Wetland area, I believe just east of Kettleston
Hogback in Northwest Iowa.

Type of habitat: Open wetland surrounded by rolling mounds.

When: Saturday, September 25, 1993

Weather: Cool and clear

Who: Jane R. Clark
9871 Lincoln Avenue
Clive, Iowa 50325

Others with me: Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, Jim Sinclair,
Tim Schantz, Ross Silcock, John Cecil, Maridel Jackson

Describe the bird: When I first saw the bird with my binoculars, it was flying low over the water's edge between the rolling mounds which surround this wetland. It was low and my first thought was that it was a harrier. Then, I heard someone say "peregrine" and I immediately knew this was the bird being mentioned. I watched it skim along and fly between the mounds.

As it came into the foreground and chased after waterfowl along the water's edge, its dark color was very apparent. There seemed to be no markings on the face - almost as if it had a bullet shaped head. No obvious face marks. It seemed to be a dark gray or brownish bird with no predominate markings. It was large - as big or bigger than a female peregrine.

The wingbeat appeared to be slower and deeper than that of a peregrine, with a higher reach. The flight seemed less relentless or intense than that of a peregrine.

Conditions: Lighting was good, distance was 300-500 feet, binoculars 10 power.

The flight and style of the bird did not seem to be Peregrine-like and the lack of markings on the face made me conclude it to be a Gyrfalcon.

Previous experience with Gyrfalcon: None

Previous experience with Peregrine: I worked as coordinator of the volunteers for the Peregrine release in Des Moines in 1991 and spent many hours observing over 20 different birds during three releases that summer. (continued on page 2)

page 2 Jane R. Clark/Gyrfalcon Documentation

I also coordinated volunteers to observe the three Peregrines which hatched out on the American Republic Building during the summer of 1993. This entailed many hours watching both the adults and the immatures at close range and at a distance, both in flight and perching. The adult male was a classic Tundra form and the adult female was a large, dark form - very different from each other in appearance. I also rescued the young male, and one of the young females from poor landings - this involved picking them up carefully and placing them in boxes. I would say I spent at least 50 hours observing Peregrines this past summer.

Field notes were made Sunday, September 26, 1993.

This form completed Thursday, December 2, 1993.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SPECIES FOR IOWA

Species: Gyrfalcon

Date: September 25, 1993

Location: Kettleson W.P.A., Dickinson County

Observer: Ross Silcock

Narrative: Jim Sinclair, Tim Schantz, and I decided to forego the afternoon session of the fall IOU meeting at Ruthven to look for birds. At about 3.30 pm we arrived at the Kettleson W.P.A. pond (large pond nearest a gravel road to its north) and were looking at the waterbirds present, including geese, ducks, and some gulls. Also there was a carload including Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, John Cecil, Maridel Jackson, and Jane Clark (I think this last is correct). We were all looking south to the pond, and both cars decided to move westward to maximise the light conditions, so the we were essentially looking south-southeastward. The sun was shining and was to our right and not a problem in lighting for birds on the pond. I was leaning against the car, Jim was standing to my left, and Tim was sitting in the car. We were all looking at the pond when Tim called out "Peregrine". Having seen several Peregrine Falcons, but always enjoying watching these beautiful flyers, I raised my binoculars to see the "Peregrine", but instead saw an absolutely awesome large falcon flying from right to left across the pond, making passes at various ducks present. Meanwhile, I heard Gene suggest Prairie Falcon, but the size of this bird and obvious power and effortless nature of its flight led me to suggest (quietly!) to Tim that it was a Gyrfalcon. I was led to this conclusion not only by its flight characteristics, but by the clear lack of any of the field marks of the two smaller species mentioned. There was no cap effect, no contrast in coloration between the cap and cheek areas, no "mustache" marks, no pale wing linings, no contrast between upper- and underparts, and no tail pattern, just a large, slaty or dark gray falcon with a noticeably long tail. The latter gave the bird something of the shape of a Cooper's Hawk in flight. While making passes at ducks, the bird banked a couple of times, and I saw both upperparts and underparts very well. During its pass across the pond, the bird was about 150 yards from me. The bird turned south and flew out of sight towards the Spirit Lake water tower. The elapsed time of closest observation was about 10-15 seconds.

The only other possibility seemed to be a large adult female Peregrine Falcon, but such a bird would have noticeable face markings, noticeably paler underparts, would have been brown rather than gray if an immature, and would have been dwarfed by the Canada Geese (large races) which the bird flew past; this bird had none of these features.

There were two items which I had to check later in the afternoon: early arrival dates in fall for Gyrfalcons in Minnesota, and the question of tail length. Early arrivals in northern Minnesota are in mid-September, and the single date available for southern Minnesota is September 22, according to Janssen (Minnesota Birds). Regarding tail length, the primaries

of both Prairie and Peregrine Falcon reach to the end of the tail, but in Gyrfalcon reach only half way, implying a longer tail in the latter species (NGS Field Guide; Hawks (Clark and Wheeler)).



Ross Silcock
PO Box 300
Tabor, IA 51763

This account written Sunday evening September 26, 1993. No field guides were carried in the field, and brief notes were made in the field, from which the above account was made.

DOCUMENTATION

Extraordinary Bird Sighting in Iowa

092993

What Species: Gyrfalcon**How many:** 1**Location:** Dickinson County, Kettleson Hogsback Complex, over marsh area where you first enter the complex. This depression is surrounded by rolling hills fairly barren of trees**When? date?** September 25, 1993; Saturday, mid-afternoon**Weather?** clear, fairly calm, but on the leading edge of a large high pressure area from the NW. Sunday turned very windy and cold, with early morning showers.**Documentation submitted by:** Maridel Jackson

410 SW Westview Drive

Ankeny IA 50021 515-964-0140

Others with me:

Eugene and Eloise Armstrong, Jane Clark, John Cecil, Tim Schantz, Jim Sinclair and Ross Silcock

This very large falcon moved in quickly from the right side of the marsh. I believe Tim Schantz was the first to see it. I had my scope on the gulls and geese that were on the front mud flat and immediately picked it up in my scope. It had no prominent facial marks such as a peregrine or prairie falcon would have. I have been helping monitor the peregrine project in Des Moines for two years and I am very familiar with both juvenile and adult peregrine markings. It was a uniformly dark, (brownish-gray), very long winged bird, with no outstanding contrasting color. It did not seem an unusually heavy bird nor did it seem noticeably slim like a marsh harrier. Its tail was very long and lightly barred, the slight markings were not predominant (i.e. black or white), such as a marsh harrier would have (white band). I did not get a good look at its underside as we were above the bird as it traveled from right to left across the marsh. I heard no sound from the bird. I also found it very interesting that the gulls and geese did not panic. A few flew up but for the most part they stayed as they were. It was noticeably larger than the gulls which consisted of Franklins and Ring-billed. The Canadian geese appeared somewhat larger but not gigantic next to it. Its wing movement was strong, steady and powerful as it quickly flew across the marsh and ascended up the hill beyond. It was not a fluttery type movement at any time. It simply moved in, over and beyond in a very quick, sweeping motion dominating the terrain as it did so.

There was discussion as we watched...to look for relative size, movement, distinguishing marks and particularly did any one see any facial pattern? This was not leading type discussion but to be sure everyone present really took a good look in the short time the bird was present.

2.....

documentation (gyrfalcon) continued

The bird by flight and behavior was obviously a falcon. It certainly was not a merlin or kestrel by sheer size factor. It had no facial pattern like a prairie or peregrine would have.

The initial question as to what the bird was, was sorted out as we watched it and zeroed in on identifying marks, behavior, size, etc.

The lighting was excellent from where we were watching, the distance was approximately 300 to 700 feet from near to far.

As mentioned before, I have worked with the peregrine project, have seen lots of kestrels, hawks, ospreys, eagles, harriers, a few merlins, and to my regret only one prairie falcon. However the size of this bird was much larger than the other falcons and obviously not one of the other above mentioned birds.

I wrote my initial notes at the sight, several more that night and did not discuss it with anyone with any knowledge before writing my final documentation.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

93-22

What species? Gyr falcon How many? 1

Location? restored marsh just east of Spirit Lake, approx 2 mi south of Mn. border

Type of Habitat? restored marsh

When? date(s): 9/25/93 time: 5:50 p.m.

Who? your name and address: Jim Sinclair, 810 North 8 St. Indianola

Others with you: Ross Silcock, Tim Schantz, Armstrongs, John Cecil Sane Clark, Muridell Jackson

Others before or after you: _____

Red-tail size

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A very large dark slate gray falcon with almost no discernable field marks. The birds general appearance was a uniform dark gray including head, neck, breast, mantle, underwing and tail. The bird gave an elongated appearance because of both overall size and the relatively long tail. The wings were very long and although not what I would describe as wide certainly not narrow either. The falcon approached the marsh from the south-southwest, teinted once at the water-pool and gulls on the water, banked towards the east and flew parallel to the road. The wing strokes were slow, almost languid, yet produced astonishing speed and power. The bird then turned back towards the south and flew out of sight.

Similar species; how eliminated: Bird was bigger than any Peregrine or Prairie falcon that I have seen. The slate gray color, dark underwings and lack of discernable axillars eliminate Prairie falcon. The birds 'giz' was not that of a Peregrine - no winged anchor appearance. The tail was too long, the wingbeats too slow for a Peregrine. There was absolutely no facial pattern or helmet effect and no discernable difference in color from dorsal to ventral.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? yes

If yes, explain: we were, to a person, startled by the magnitude of the bird. Needless to say, a sept. Gyr was not expected.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

lighting conditions were good. Bird was seen as close as 120 yds flying at eye level. 10x42

Previous experience with species and similar ones: limited experience with Gyr and Prairie falcon, fairly extensive with Peregrines

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Brief look at AOS field guide

How long before field notes made? 2 hours this form completed? 24 hours

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).