

Peregrine Falcon
23 Jun 1984
Ames, Story Co., IA
*Paul Martsching
IBL 54:82; 55:58

Record Number: 84-18
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Paul Martsching, 23 June 1984
Paul Martsching, 11 October 1984 (with cover note)

LETTERS

Paul Martsching to Dinsmore, 16 October 1884 (with 2 pages of notes)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 54:82
Records Committee: IBL 55:58

VOTE: 2-III, 3-IV, 2-V

V, I can't believe that any one can see tail bands on a bird flying 1/2 block away in a strong wind without aid of binoculars! Wing can make wing shape deceiving. Why wasn't facial mark seen when more difficult detail is described? Is there a falconer in Ames? We have had reports from fall (3), winter and summer of a strange bird in Ames.

V, Prairie Falcon not entirely ruled out.

IV, Buteos fly with 'pointy' wings into a strong wind. In fact, the description sounds like a Swainson's Hawk with its 'tannish breast' and banded tail and gray upperparts.

IV, Circumstances and description not the greatest. Date also raises doubts. Strong wind suggests that flight may have been affected--possibility of Cooper's Hawk.

III, I reluctantly vote III. I know large falcons are possible in Iowa. Observer explains why he thinks it's a falcon, and this is plausible. If he saw the underwing-should have stated he could therefore eliminate prairie falcon, but he probably could, and no streaking on breast is mentioned. Poor viewing conditions, but big falcons only come when they aren't expected. I'm very glad he wrote the documentation before checking with the books, but perhaps he could have added a few clarifying comments afterwards.

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation
by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: PEREGRINE FALCON
DATE SEEN: June 23, 1984
SITE OF OBSERVATION: Ames, Story County
OBSERVERS: Paul Martsching
DATE OF REVIEW: 1984
METHOD OF REVIEW: Circulation by mail to Committee
CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS:

While the details submitted seem reasonable, the Committee voted this record a "V", primarily because of doubts raised by the windy conditions and the lack of optical equipment. Note that a "V" classification means that the evidence was insufficient to make a decision. Committee members did not consider Prairie Falcon to be adequately eliminated, nor even Swainson's Hawk (with the wind affecting flight pattern). The possibility of Cooper's Hawk was also raised, again with normal flight pattern affected by wind conditions. A final point of doubt was the summer date. Thus on balance the Committee felt that the objections raised were not adequately balanced by the documentation, and thus voted conservatively for a "V".

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

Paul Martsching
1120 Marston
Ames, Iowa 50010

16 October 1984

Regarding 23 June 1984 Peregrine Falcon

One will get a very excellent idea of what I saw by taking the older edition (the one most people still have) of Golden Press BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA page 79 or 80 and viewing it from a distance of about 6 feet. The bird I saw was a bit more tannish on the upper breast. (The photographs across from pages 113 & 160 in BIRDS OF PREY OF THE WORLD by Grossman & Hamlet show an adult which is tannish right up under the head as well as the breast.)

While most of the time it had its wings half folded (headed into strong wind) it on several occasions spread its wings out more, & at closest had them in 'normal' position showing falcon shape well. At that point the bird was more than 60 degrees above the horizon so was not getting a lot of distortion from perspective.

The pattern of apparent white & gray stripe of the rear half & tips of the wings with forepart of wings grayish is quite distinctive. A review of various books: BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS, BIRDS OF PREY OF THE WORLD, & Bent's LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS OF PREY gives no indication that Swainson's Hawk ever shows this coloration of pattern on the underside of the wings. (Especially see drawings of Juv. & adults page 264 BIRDS OF PREY OF THE WORLD.) In all but the dark phase juveniles & adults have very pale forepart of wings with darker hindwing area with dark 'stripes'. This underwing pattern & color eliminates Prairie Falcon (which in anycase is tannish brown above) in which the black 'armpits' are quite obvious - at least this was the case with the adult & immature that I've seen. The adult Swainson's is out of the question - all but the dark phase having a more or less chestnut patch on the upper breast. Of the several hundred I've seen over the years in South Dakota, nearly all were the light phase.

The banding on the tail of a Cooper's Hawk usually shows up much better than the tail banding of this bird - very pale & black as compared to gray & black.

Also while the respective lengths of the Cooper's Hawk & Peregrine are about the same, about the length of a Crow, this bird's wing span was more nearly that of a Crow - a Crow flew up to within what appeared to be about 10 feet of this bird (This is what really got my attention - when I first saw this bird it was quite a ways off, appeared black, & as it was bucking the wind, it was tilting up & down a great deal - I'd seen crows doing this, often so didn't pay much attention till a Crow flew up near it, then it became obvious that this bird was much slimmer with a longer slimmer tail, & as it got its wings fairly much open that it was very much narrower winged) At any rate I cannot see how a Cooper's Hawk could have its wings spread to 'normal' position & yet have them appear to be very narrow. I have seen a few Cooper's. At closest the bird was at a high enuf angle along with 'tilting back' to get a real good view of its overall shape.

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In review:

The bird was far enuf away that no markings were seen on the breast or belly.

The mustache mark was not seen.

The bird had falcon shape, was about the length & wingspread of a Crow - actual comparison.

The bird was dark gray above without white rump patch.

The bird below had tannish breast & belly, wings grayish forepart, dark with white stripeing rear half & tips, tail gray & barred.

Paul Martsching



I would like the enclosed sheet 84-18
filed with the documentation.
If any body ever goes thru the papers
& sees the documentation I would
like for them to see ~~this~~ the enclosed
sheet also.

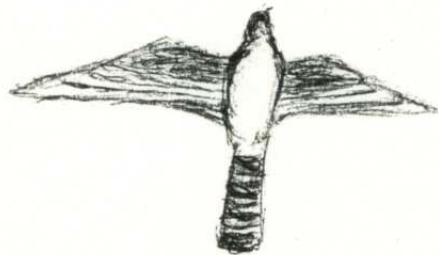
PWM.

11 October 1984

84-18

Reg: Peregrine Falcon 23 June 1984

At its closest the bird in question was something like the drawing - it did get its wings spread out for a short time.



It'd be hard put
to say a bird

with such narrow wings

could be a Cooper's or Swainson's.

Perhaps I neglected to make it clear that it had ever gotten its wings out to "normal" position. It did get close enuf so the breast & belly were tannish in contrast to the gray & black tail & gray & whitish "lined" wings; Also the top side appeared solid dark gray.

It is unfortunate that I was unable to get binoculars on the bird.

It is true that most of the time this bird was in view its wings were half folded making any comment on their shape unreliable. When close enuf to see tannish breast & belly it was also close enuf to have seen tannish wings & tan & brown tail if that had been the case.

Paul Martsching
1170 Marston

Ames, Iowa 50010
I do understand the great reluctance to put this sighting as Class III because of the date.
See photos Birds of Prey of the World Grossman & Hallett 113+160. description 2307

16 Oct 1984

Dear Dr. Dinsmore;

I hate to bother you again about this, but I feel I must do it.

Enclosed is a more organized & thot-out 'paper' on the 23 June Pereigrine sighting. Perhaps it explains why I'm totally convinced that it was indeed a Pereigrine.

I am well aware that the big bugaboo is the date. If it'd been seen a month earlier probably little would have been said.

I'm sure there are some on the committee who want to hear about the mustache mark before accepting a record for that time of the year. Well, I didn't notice a mustache mark - mostly I think because the bird wasn't that close - yet to tell the truth I've never really seen it very well on any of the Peregrines I've seen. It's hard to see when they're overhead zipping around.

With this added to my original documentation I've described what I saw to the best of my ability & explained my reasons for my identification.

As far as any further action, you may do what you like, but I must insist that enclosed papers be put on file with my original documentation so that anyone seeing the records committee's report may also see my side.

Looking forward to seeing you at the next Big Bluestem meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carl Martel". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Sincerely,".

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

Species PEREGRINE FALCON 2. Number: One

3. Location Ames, Story County, Iowa

4. Date: 23 June 5. Time Bird seen: 6:20 pm CDST to abt one minute

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):

When approaching stop light, saw what I first thought was a Crow flying into a very strong north wind, with wings half folded and tilting up and then down, etc a great deal, but making actual progress towards the east. As I came to the stop light a crow came to within a very few feet of the bird. It was about the length of a crow tho much slimmer, also about the ^{same} wing spread, but the wings much narrower and very pointy. As the bird got closer (I was going west) it finally tipped up with the sun shining on the bottom side & I got a good, but short look before the traffic light changed. It also for a short time spread its wings to show typical falcon shape. It was dark gray above. The breast was tannish, the tail long, narrow,

7. Description of voice, if heard: ~~with light & dark gray bands.~~, the wings were gray not heard below, with several light stripes lengthwise on the

8. Description of behavior: rear portion. flying into very strong north wind, tilting up & down with wings half folded most of time.

9. Habitat - general: I once saw a Prairie Falcon flying the same way in S. Dakota. specific: in town (southwest of intersection of 13th & Grand)

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Prairie Falcon, not overall tannish.
Marsh Hawk, no white rump, wings too dark below, wings too pointy

11. Distance (how measured)? At closest $\frac{1}{2}$ block (less?) 12. Optical equipment: none

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
Me in car facing west; sun west-north west; clear; bird to southwest

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Saw in Ames several times last Fall; also seen south of Colo year before that.

15. Other observers: none that I know of

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Field Guide To the Birds - Peterson
Birds of North America - Golden Press
Wrote documentation before looked in books

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 3/4 hour

Paul Marschke Address: 1120 Marston
Signature
Date: 23 June 1984 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50010