

Gyr Falcon  
28 Dec 1986  
n. of Cone M., Louisa Co., IA  
\*T. Dwyer  
IBL 57:55, 78

Record Number: 86-20  
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Timothy L. Dwyer

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 57:55

Records Committee: IBL 57:78

VOTE: 2-III, 2-IV, 2-V, 1-VI

VI, This species is often identified only by combination of subjective features, but no notes were made for 90 minutes about a 3 minute observation. There is no evidence that this bird was even a falcon. In fact, all of the description (except, perhaps "slim, ill-defined, but obvious 'mustache' marks") is entirely consistent with immature Cooper's Hawk or even N. Goshawk.

V, I can't identify bird from description. I saw large brownish Cooper's Hawk about 1 mile from this location the next day, after searching the area for several hours. I think it is much more likely that this was a large accipiter than a gyrfalcon, but I can't really tell.

IV, Overall, the documentation is highly suggestive of Gyr Falcon but I have a hard time voting for the acceptance of a first state record on the written evidence of one person. There are a couple of things that do not read quite right in the documentation. High variability in this species and *F. peregrinus* subspecies could be interpreted wrong for *F. rusticolus*. More observers with different viewpoints would have helped with this record. This is a very difficult species to identify even in the hand.

IV, This is a most interesting sighting. I only wish the documentation had been done in more detail. For example, how were size and color judged?; what exactly did the breast look like?; how long was the tail?; what did the throat look like? a drawing of bird perched and flying would have been helpful. This is very probably a correct ID and the first reported sighting of a gyr in Iowa and a more detailed description may make it more convincing.

III, All points of identification confirm Gyr Falcon and combine to eliminate other raptors.

V, Puzzling. Describes Goshawk very well, except (as pointed out by observer) for head pattern. Could even be a buteo. Description precludes ID.

III, I find it a plausible description, though I would be happier with mention of why it isn't one of those odd Redtails.

86-26

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

86-20

by the Records Committee  
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: *Gyr-falcon*

DATE SEEN: 12-28-86

SITE OF OBSERVATION: n. of Cone M., Louisa Co.

OBSERVERS: T. Dwyer

DATE OF REVIEW: 5-30-87

METHOD OF REVIEW: *Vote*

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS:

*The committee felt that the description, while very suggestive, did not completely rule out the possibility of other much more common raptors.*

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.

## DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Gyr Falcon How many? 1Location? About 1/2 mile North of Cone Marsh on Hwy 6-28 in Louisa Co, IowaType of habitat? Open country, scattered small trees, weedy fence rows.When? date(s): 28 Dec. 1986 time: 3:00 to 3:03 P.M. (est.)Who? your name and address: Timothy L. Dwyer, 814 Woodburn Ave. Muscatine, Ia. 52761others with you: NONEothers before or after you: NONE

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A large gray hawk-like bird with a bulky body was on a pole along the road. I stopped the car and watched him perched from the back & side for about two minutes. I judged the bird to be about 20 inches long. The back, wings and tail were a light shade of gray with paler brownish feather edges. The head and neck were paler than the body. The bird had slim, ill-defined but obvious "mustache" marks and a dark line extending back from the dark eye. Top of head was pale. The bill was dark. The bird dropped from the pole and headed directly away from me very low to the ground with slow wing beats. As the bird dropped from the pole I had a good look at the armpits, there was no black. Its wingspan appeared to be over twice the body length and the wings were broader & more rounded than other falcons I've seen. The body was thick and barrel-shaped, spotted dark on off-white up to the throat. Legs and feet were not observed. The bird flew out of sight towards the southeast. It was not heard.

Similar species and how eliminated: Prairie Falcon is smaller, browner & has black axillars. Peregrine Falcon is smaller, has more pointed wings and has a much more distinctive head pattern. Goshawk's head pattern is different, is whiter below in gray plumage and has shorter wings. Northern Harrier is smaller, also has a white rump and holds wings in a dihedral, this bird did not.  
Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Good sunlight at 12 yards. It was on top of a telephone pole along the road I was on, just across the road. Also in flight from 12 yards until out of sight. 12x40 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen Peregrine Falcon in Iowa and Prairie Falcon in Wyoming. I've seen Goshawks five or six times in Iowa.  
References and persons consulted before writing description: NONE

How long before field notes made? 1 hr. 30 min. this form completed? 1 day

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