

Gyrffalcon
27 Mar 1992

Record Number: 92-33
Classification: A-P

near Emmet County and Minnesota borders, Kossuth Co., IA

*Bolduan

IBL 63:68, P-0351

DOCUMENTATION

Brad Bolduan, 117 Lake Park Blvd., Fairmont, MN 56031

(6/30/93)

LETTERS

Peder H. Svingen to Thomas H. Kent, 26 Dec 1992

Thomas H. Kent to Brad Bolduan, 7 Jan 1992

Brad Bolduan to Thomas Kent [Jan 1992]

PHOTOGRAPHS

Brad Bolduan, P-0351

REFERENCES

Records Committee: IBL 63:68

Bolduan, B. 1994. Gyrffalcon in Kossuth County. IBL 64:21-22.

VOTE: 7 A-P

A-P, The excellent photographs show a very large falcon lacking the thick mustache mark of the Peregrine and the black axillaries of Prairie Falcon. In addition, the wings are broad at the base, and the translucent of the flight feathers can be seen in two of the pictures. Also consistent with Gyrffalcon was the description of low flight patterns. What a super sighting!

A-P, Immature dark phase Gyrffalcon. Interpretation of the branch thickness to raptor size indicates the pictured bird is too large to be any other falcon. It is at least 25" long. The behavior, strong flight and swallow swoops to take ducks, is also like a Gyrffalcon. The other diagnostic characteristics depicted in the photos are thin mustache, uniformly colored dark brown back, wings, nape, and tail, off white throat, heavy brown streaking and tear dropping on breast, pointed wings and long tail. Peregrine would have a heavy mustache and Prairie would be light brown on the back in flight. Both are significantly smaller than this falcon measures.

A-P, If a Gyrffalcon, the brown color indicates an immature gray phase bird. The markings on the head are a perfect fit for the description and drawing in Clark. I cannot judge the size, although the bird appears large and bulky. Male Gyrffalcon can overlap in size with female Peregrine Falcon. The broad wings and long tail fit Gyrffalcon. Too bad the wing/tail extension cannot be seen in the perched bird, where it would be diagnostic.

A-P, Looking at the photos I see a falcon shaped silhouette with a long strongly tapered tail. The underwing coverts were darker than the flight feathers but not blackish like a Prairie Falcon. The tail is long with lots of narrow pale bands and a heavily streaked breast. The cere and legs were bluish, indicating an immature bird. The back and upper wing coverts were a medium gray-brown and overall the bird was brown on the back and upperwings without windows or whitish splotches. The flight photo is good. The bird shows a short, thin, pale superciliary line with a dark area behind the eye. There is a narrow dark

mustache mark. The underparts are creamy with heavy brown streaking. The bird had broader less pointed wings and rounded wing tips. The body is rather heavy with a wide long tail. All these marks are clearly those of an immature Gyrfalcon.

A-P, Sufficient details and good photos were provided for a Gyrfalcon. The photos especially significant for me were the ones of the bird taking off from the perch which shows a grayish-type color with steaks on the breast and the small mustache mark, the hunched-back flying picture, and the all-silhouette picture of a large falcon with a massive tail and wings. This is an exciting bird to be able to review!

LITERATURE CITED

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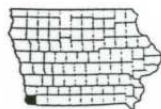
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526 Reno St., Iowa City, IA 52245

BLACK-NECKED STILT AT RIVERTON AREA

ANN JOHNSON AND PAM ALLEN

Iowa has long been a melting pot for species from other regions of North America. Iowa birders know that the southwestern corner of the state is the most likely place to find species that are more commonly found in Nebraska, Kansas, or other states further south. On 12 May 1992, we headed for southwestern Iowa in search of the Brown Pelican and Snowy Plover that had been found there earlier. Although the pelican eluded us, the plover was in sight in the Allen's scope when Johnson arrived at the Riverton Area in Fremont County. The water level was low, and the surrounding mudflats were alive with numerous shorebirds.



After studying the plover for a time, Johnson began panning the mudflats for other species. A large concentration of Hudsonian Godwits was present, but one large shorebird was immediately identifiable as a Black-necked Stilt. The bird was much taller than the other birds near it, and its black-and-white markings were distinctive. The black upper parts extended from the foreneck, down the nape, mantle, and wings. The underparts were white, as was a spot above the eye. A white "hook" was visible between the neck and the wing. The long, bright pink-to-red legs created a sharp contrast to the body. The black bill was long, straight, and needle-like.

Technological advances have not escaped the birding world. The Allen's cellular phone allowed for a quick call to Ross Silcock, who along with Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault, soon appeared on the scene. The bird was not seen again the next day.

This observation is the third accepted record of Black-necked Stilt in Iowa. Although the species may be easily observed as nearby as central Kansas in the Cheyenne Bottoms areas, it was not verified in Iowa and added to the state list until

1984. Twelve earlier reports of stilts in Iowa were judged to have insufficient information for acceptance (Dinsmore et al. 1984). The first accepted record for the state was a pair that was photographed at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County on 1-2 June 1984 (Kent and Silcock 1985). The second observation occurred nearly seven years later when a single bird was observed by many on 6-14 April 1991 in Woodbury County (Huser 1992). Perhaps with an increase in the level of Iowa birders' activity, sightings may soon become a nearly annual occurrence. It is certainly a bird Iowans should be looking for during shorebird migration.

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Huser, B. 1992. Black-necked Stilt in Woodbury County. *Iowa Bird Life* 62:84.

532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211 and 1601 Pleasant Street, West Des Moines, IA 50265

GYRFALCON IN KOSSUTH COUNTY

BRAD BOLDUAN

On 27 March 1992, I was photographing waterfowl at the Iowa Lake Wildlife Management Area in northwestern Kossuth County. I was at the edge of the water in a pothole which contained hundreds of ducks and geese when almost all of the birds flushed. I then saw a large bird flying in the midst of a large flock of ducks about 100 yards away. It rapidly closed the gap between it and one of the ducks. The bird then appeared to grab the duck in midflight and flew out of sight behind a hill.



After about 30 minutes, I decided to look for this bird. As I came to the crest of a rise between two potholes, a large raptor flew from a Wood Duck box to a nearby willow. I walked to the willow where I thought the bird had landed. Just as I was giving up on relocating the bird, a large raptor flushed about 20 yards from me. Due to its size, my first impression was that the bird was a Great Horned Owl. The bird flew in a semicircle about 40 yards from me. During this time it banked away from me showing a definite falcon silhouette. The falcon then flew about 100 yards north before flying past me and landing near my original position to the south. As the falcon flew below eye level, I was able to see the top of the falcon. I had not yet been able to see any color on the bird so I decided to walk to the southwest and approach the bird with the sun at my back. I had walked about 100 yards when the falcon flew from its perch and made a complete circle around me. It broke from the circle and flew over a pond at an elevation of about 20 feet, flushing a duck from the pond's surface a short distance in front of it. The falcon made a shallow dive and knocked the duck into the water where it landed with a large splash. The falcon then flew along the edge of the pothole and flushed another duck which flew in front of and below the falcon. When the duck was about 10 yards above the water, the falcon made a shallow swoop, grabbed the duck with its talons, and flew north with the duck in its grasp. The falcon landed in a willow tree north of the pond.

I approached to within about 40 yards of the falcon with the sun at my back. Since I was on a hill, the falcon was just above my eye level. At this angle, I could still not make out any distinct facial markings. My view was partially obstructed by a small branch, and the falcon was looking directly at me. The breast appeared streaked, and the entire bird appeared dark. When it flew, I could see the dark wing linings which show in the picture I took at this time. The bird flew north into Minnesota.

The photographs I took of this bird allowed it to be identified later as a Gyrfalcon. Beside being dramatic, the falcon's behavior was an aid in identification. Its flight and perch sites were relatively low to the ground. I never saw the falcon fly higher than 100 feet (probably much less) and its highest perch was about 35 feet above the ground. It made its kills after shallow powered swoops. The plumage patterns were difficult to distinguish in the field but it appeared entirely dark in flight.

This is the first documented record of a Gyrfalcon in Iowa. There have been numerous other reports of this species in the state but none have been supported by photographs or good documentation of the bird. Gyrfalcons have been reported from all states adjacent to Iowa except Missouri so this record is long overdue.

117 Lake Park Blvd., Fairmont, MN 56031

I.O.U. BUSINESS

FALL BUSINESS MEETING

Ruthven, 25 September 1993, 3:30 to 4:50 p.m.

PRESIDING: ANN BARKER, PRESIDENT

ANN BARKER FOR HILDA SICKELS, SECRETARY

Barker thanked Jim Fuller and local hosts Lee and Nancy Schoenewe for their work in organizing the meeting. Minutes for the spring business meeting were read and approved as corrected (motion by Pam Allen, seconded by Rick Hollis).

Reports

Treasurer: Pam Allen distributed financial statements for the period ending 31 August 1993, including a statement of support, revenues and expenses, and membership information. Membership has reached a plateau of 660-670. Tom Kent suggested that institutional members should be listed as subscribers rather than as members.

Records: Tom Kent reported that the committee is continuing to review old records. Files have been reorganized. Rules have been revised so that anyone can request a re-review of any record.

Membership: Diane Porter has been appointed committee chair. Jim Sinclair will again mail membership information to feeder survey participants who have requested it.

Publications: The committee will meet after the business meeting.

Library-Historical: The committee has not met. Hank Zaletel has continued to send materials to the special collections at the Iowa State University Library.

Breeding Bird Atlas: No report.

Big Day: No report.

Education Booklet Promotion: Hank Zaletel reported that 392 copies of the booklet have been sold. Review copies have been sent to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union and the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. Notices have been sent to each school district in Iowa.

Spring Count: Pete Petersen reported that the count took place 9 May with reports from only seven counties submitted. There is still some sentiment that the count date should be that of the national count. The committee was asked to report to the board of directors at its fall meeting and recommend a date for the 1994 count and to report to the membership at the spring meeting with suggestions for a permanent date arrangement. The committee will meet after the business meeting.

Field Trip: Ann Johnson reported good attendance and high interest. The final 1993 trip is scheduled for 20 November to the Red Rock area. Trips planned for 1994 include one on 9 April to Cone Marsh.

Code of Ethics: Barker reported that the committee is still being assembled; it currently includes Rick Hollis, chair, and Beth Brown. Hollis would like to publish a proposed code in the newsletter before a vote by the membership. A straw poll revealed that the membership favored a long form of the code rather than the short form.

Nominating: Barker has appointed a committee composed of Bob Cecil, chair, Diane Porter, and Francis Moore to prepare a slate of officer and board candidates for consideration for election at the spring meeting.

Birdline: Fuller reported that calls were down during the summer floods. Apparently the message about membership information has generated some new members.

Old business

Upcoming meetings: Plans are set for the spring 1994 meeting in Ames. A fact sheet prepared by Jim Dinsmore was reviewed.

Announcements

Members were notified that Cal Knight and Jim Walter have been ill recently.

BOOK REVIEW

Finches & Sparrows. An Identification Guide by Peter Clement, illustrated by Alan Harris and John Davis. Christopher Helm, London, 1993, 500 pp., hardbound \$49.50 This book is similar in format to earlier guides on seabirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, and swallows. Three short introductory chapters tell how to use the book and provide background on the groups covered. Most of the book is devoted to accounts of 290 species in three families (the Fringillidae including 3 species of Fringillinae and 125 species of Carduelinae, 128 species of Estrildidae, and 34 species of Passeridae.) The coverage varies slightly but generally includes identification, description, geographic variation, voice, status, habitat, behavior, distribution, movements, measurements, and references. Because of the book's emphasis on identification, the first two sections are the most detailed. The 73 color plates, with a range map and brief description of key characteristics on the facing page, are an important feature. A glossary, bibliography, and index complete the book.

Potential purchasers of this book should know that the author's definition of sparrows does not include the familiar sparrows we find in Iowa. Only 12 species found in Iowa are covered in this book. Most of the species occur in the Old World, and only 31 are New World species. The illustrations are very well done, usually showing a male, female, and juvenile (but five plumages for the American Goldfinch and nine for the Common Redpoll). Both artists have done an excellent job of capturing the subtle streaks and other features of many of these species. I especially liked Davis' plate of the crossbills. Overall, the plates and the brief descriptions on the facing page seem to provide enough information to identify the various species. Only a few of the color plates show a bird in flight but black-and-white illustrations in the text show key flight characteristics for some species.

A few final comments: The range maps are too small to provide much detail of a species' range. The range map of the House Finch doesn't show the completion of that species' march westward across Iowa and the Great Plains. Iowa readers will do a double take when they find both species of crossbills with unfamiliar "European" names (Common Crossbill, Two-barred Crossbill). These aside, this is a high-quality book that will be a welcome addition to many birder's libraries, especially those who visit the Old World.--J.J.D.



Gyrfalcon P-0351
NW, Kossuth Co., IA
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92-33

111-024

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Gyr Falcon
NW, Kossuth Co., IA
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P-0351

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Gyr Falcon
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27 Mar 1992 Brad Bolduan
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Dear Mr. Svingen:

I do not have much for field notes regarding that large falcon. The bird appeared uniformly dark most of the time it was circling me and was backlit on its closest passes. The main reason I did not consider a gyr was because I expected the wing tips of a gyr to be more rounded. I also didn't know the underwings of a gyr were two-toned.

The closest I ever got to the bird was about twenty yards, but at that distance it flushed before I was able to locate it. The only reason I bring this up now is because when it first flushed, I was almost sure I was flushing a Great Horned Owl - due only to its size. I later thought this impression was entirely because the bird surprised me.

At any rate here is the extent of my field notes:

One large falcon took and held waterfowl in shallow dive. Immature. Appeared larger than crow smaller than barred owl(?). Rufus on top(?). dark below. Hard to see underneath due to backlighting. May have seen wing struts when taking off (photographed).

Head light (colored) - no marks noted.

Took at least two ducks in shallow dives. 1 carried away. 2nd saw splash after a dive. Believe I saw another dead duck on the water before I saw a kill left on the water. Seemed tame. Fairly easily approached to ~40 yds and approached to within ~40 yds of me.

Face clean, mustache if present thin.

Other things which I remember:

The bird came from the south.

Hundreds of ducks and geese were present when it came in, all but about 5 Canada geese flushed.

The bird was never seen "high" (over 100 ft., probably much less).

All dives were very shallow, almost direct flight. (The birds I saw taken were flushed as the falcon came close and fairly low. The duck would travel about 30 yds. and reach a height just (~5 yds) below the falcon. The falcon would then make that shallow swoop (I say swoop, but it was a powered flight) down to the bird and either carry the bird away or knock it onto the water.

At no point could this bird have been mistaken for a goshawk, it was 100% falcon.

The bird perched at least five times in the hour I knew it was around. (a great majority of its time was on a perch). Perches were 5-40 ft above the ground, one was over open water.

I never saw the bird miss prey.

The bird left by flying NW across the state line into Minnesota. This was followed by a string of waterfowl coming south out of Minnesota. It took me twenty minutes to get back to my car to relocate the bird. The bird was never relocated after searching county and township roads for about an hour.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS AND NOTES WERE TAKEN IN IOWA (100 to 300 yds from the state line) NO NOTES OR PHOTOS WERE TAKEN IN MINNESOTA. The bird was, however, seen flying across the state line after being flushed for the last time. The IOU has not seen the photos - I don't know who to contact.

I took thirteen pictures total, I chose the most useful to send to you. If you want reprints of the entire set let me know. I have 8x10's of the bird taking off it is easier to see detail on these prints, I should have more of them within the week. If this would help let me know.

Thank you for your interest in this bird. Unfortunately I have another mystery bird coming up. Probably just an Immature Broadwing. *-turned out to be a Roughlegged duck phase in June.*

Sincerely;

Brad Bolduan

151 Bedford St. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414-3668

28 December 1992

Thomas H. Kent, M.D.
Iowa Bird Records Committee
211 Richards St.
Iowa City, IA 52246-3519

Dear Dr. Kent,

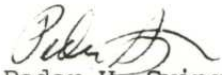
Enclosed please find documentation and three photographs of an apparent Gyrfalcon (immature gray morph?) on 27 March 1992 in north central Iowa, probably Kossuth County. I apologize for not forwarding this information to you earlier. After I received the photos, I corresponded with the observer (Mr. Bolduan's reply is enclosed). The photos were independently reviewed by Kim Eckert and myself. Both of us concluded that they were consistent with Gyrfalcon, rather than Prairie Falcon as initially identified by Mr. Bolduan. The location printed on the back of the photographs is erroneous; it was written by myself before Mr. Bolduan informed me that they were actually taken in Iowa. You may wish to correspond further with Mr. Bolduan, since he has additional photographs that may be useful for your deliberations.

Brad Bolduan, 117 Lake Park Boulevard, Fairmont, MN 56031.
(507) 235-3745

Although Gyrfalcon is extremely rare in southern Minnesota, there are a few previous records close to the Iowa border. On 10 November 1990, Ray Glassel and Robert Janssen found one near Dundee in Nobles County and followed the bird into nearby Jackson County, Minnesota. The 1990-91 total of 14 records for this species (24 September 1990 through 01 May 1991) was exceptional and paralleled its irruption into other states and provinces (*The Loon* 63:163-167).

The following season, at least 15 individuals were reported in Minnesota, from 07 November 1991 through 13 April 1992 (including the Martin County record). Kim Eckert is preparing another summary for publication. Besides the Martin County record, "southerly" reports included: CBC records from Dakota (good details according to the CBC editor) and Chippewa counties, 25 December 1991 in Anoka County by Karl Bardon, and a fairly well-documented sighting on 11 January 1992 in Olmsted County by Dr. Ray Faber (this last record was found Acceptable by the Minnesota Ornithological Records Committee on a 6-1 vote).

Thus far in the fall/winter of 1992, there are four reports of Gyrfalcon from northern Minnesota! A good showing in three consecutive seasons for a species which is considered rare/casual in the state. I hope this information will be helpful; let me know if there are any questions.


Peder H. Svingen
Seasonal Reports Editor
cc: Brad Bolduan

January 7, 1993

Brad Bolduan
117 Lake Park Blvd.
Fairmount, MN 56031

Dear Brad:

Peder Svingen has passed on to the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Records Committee your photos and notes on a possible Gyrfalcon. This is a most exciting record with excellent photos. It would be the first substantiated record of Gyrfalcon for Iowa.

The process of review of unusual records takes several months or more depending on the agreement among the committee and possibility of outside consultation. Ordinarily we like to have five sets of photos -- 3 to circulate and file with three copies of the record, 1 for the IOU Photo File, and 1 for publication. It is easiest for us to start with 2x2 slides (original or very high quality duplicate) and then make negatives and prints from these. If you can help us with this we would be most appreciative. Our first choice would be to have the original color slides for duplication and return to you. If the originals are color negatives, we could duplicate from these and return them. Our second choice would be to have high quality duplicates of the original slides or, if the originals are color negatives, slides from the negatives. Our third choice would be to have 4 more sets of prints. Our last choice would be to make duplicate slides and prints from your prints, but this involves significant loss of quality.

We would be willing to reimburse you for any expenses involved.

Can you provide any further information on the exact location of the bird, date, time, and length of time you observed it.

If this record is accepted, we will ask you to write a short note for Iowa Bird Life. It would be helpful to know in advance whether you would be willing to do this.

Thanks for your help. It sounds like you had an exciting experience.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, IA 52246


Peder H. Svingen
Special Reports Editor
Iowa Ornithologists' Union

received Jan 9³/72

92-33

117 Lake Park Blvd.
Fairmont, MN 56031

Thomas Kent, Secretary
IOU Records Committee
211 Richards Street
Iowa city, IA 52246

Dear Mr. Kent:

I am particularly excited about your letter. I didn't think that this would be a state first. Another reason that I am excited is that my failure to document a Curlew Sandpiper this fall will undoubtedly prevent me from recording a Minnesota first.

I am enclosing the negatives of the Gyr. The frames which you may find most useful are numbers 22 and 34. For your reference, several people have already seen enlargements of frame 34. Kim Eckert said it was a Gyr. Frank Nicoletti was certain it was a Gyr, I am fairly sure that he said it was a dark (not gray) phase, and he also thought it was an immature male (which is consistent with my impression of its size). Frank has a 8x10 in his possession which he was also going to show to Brian Wheeler.

In addition I am enclosing slides I took in July of the bird's perch. One of these slides has a redwinged Blackbird present for size reference, the other has a meter stick held in close proximity to the perch, the centimeter marks should be legible on this slide. I think that the bird was photographed in Kossuth County, although it is fairly close to the Emmet County line. I am not exactly sure where the county line falls. The local place name was the Iowa Lake Wildlife Management Area. This WMA extends about one half mile from a county road to the MN border at or near the Kossuth/Emmet County line. This location is about (very roughly) 3/4 of a mi. east of state hwy 15. The bird was probably present for more than an hour, it was seen intermittently during that time. Total time I spent actually observing the bird was probably about 15 minutes.

The bird was seen during the afternoon of March 27, 1992.

Perhaps the best information I have regarding the birds habits and my observations is the copy of the letter I mailed Peder which you already have.

Please provide me with an example or outline regarding the requested note for Iowa Bird Life.

Please inform me of any information your sources are able to provide from the photos (i. e. color phase, sex, etc.). I am willing to help your committee in anyway possible, this process in itself is very exciting. I would appreciate being mailed information about membership in the IOU. I have been planning on joining for a couple years, but didn't know who to contact.

Sincerely,



Brad Bolduan

Please return slides & negatives when you are done making your reproductions. These are perhaps my most prized negatives and I am more comfortable when they are in my possession.