

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

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Whooping Crane

9 Apr 1999

east of De Soto NWR, Harrison Co., IA
*J. Dinsmore, *Kent, *Fuller, *Edwards
P-0621, IBL 69:95, 70:145, Sheets 1999

Record Number: 99-11

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Dinsmore (9 Apr) [9/17/99]

Thomas H. Kent (10 Apr), 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

Jim Fuller (10 Apr), 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

Chris Edwards (11 Apr), 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty 52317

PHOTOGRAPHS

T. H. Kent, 10 Apr 1999, P-0621

Don Pogensee, 11 Apr 1999, Iowa Bird Life 69(4) cover

REFERENCES

Field Reports: 69:95

Records Committee: IBL 70:145

Sheets, M.L., and J.J. Dinsmore. 1999. Whooping Cranes in
Harrison County. Iowa Bird Life 69:132-133.

VOTE: 7 A-P



Whooping Crane P-0621
e. of De Soto NWR, Harrison Co.
10 Apr 1999 T. H. Kent

99-11

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species Whooping Crane **How many?** six adults

Location? 1 mile east of DeSoto N.W.R., Harrison County

Type of habitat? open corn stubble field

When? date(s): 9 April 1999 **Time:** 4:35-5:05 p.m.

Who? Jim Dinsmore

Others with you no one

Others before or after you cast of dozens

Describe the bird(s) Unmistakable. Very large, mostly white bird with long thin neck, small head, long, black legs. Watched they as they leisurely foraged and preened. None of birds had any hint of brown or rust on them and appeared to be adults. Other than legs, feet, and bill, the only parts of the body that were not white were the tips of the wing feathers and several areas on the head. The top and back of the head were black with the black extending down to base of bill and including the eye. There was also a pencil-like extension of the black back lower down on the side of the head. The black wing tips were obvious when one of the birds extended its wings and rushed toward the other but could also be seen on the folded wing. Body somewhat oblong with tail and long folded wings giving it more elongated appearance than most herons. When they walked, the neck and head were usually extended forward and down and moved in unison with the bird's steps. I could not see any red in the crowns of any of the birds. One bird had a band on the right leg, above the bend of the leg. They generally seemed to stay in three sets of two, as if in three pairs. Did not call while I viewed them. Birds were foraging actively, probing bill in soil and seemed to be finding food. Noticed that they had lots of dirt attached to their feet as they moved through the moist soil.

Similar species and how eliminated: Sandhill Crane by color. Great Egret by black wing tips and bill was somewhat curved rather than dagger-like as in egret.

Did anyone disagree with identification? no

Viewing conditions: sky overcast but okay to see birds, they were about 1/4 mile away, watched through 20-45 power scope

Previous experience never seen the species previously

References & persons consulted before writing description: none, notes taken while watching birds, looked at Robbins field guide after I had viewed birds

How long before field notes made? Notes taken in field while viewing birds

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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Whooping Crane; **Number:** 3 pairs (adults)

Location: east of De Soto NWR, SW Harrison Co., Iowa

Date: 10 April 1999; **Time:** 7:08 to 7:52 a.m. and 1:25 to 1:55 p.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: reported on 10 April; I was with Jim Fuller and Dick Tetrault

Habitat and circumstances: plowed and disked corn and sow bean fields in flat bottom land of Missouri River.

Description of bird: Tall white birds with long necks feeding in fields were easily seen from one-half mile away. They were always three-eighths to one-half mile away between two east-west gravel roads. The birds appeared to be paired as three sets of two were almost always discernable, and one pair was often in a different field. The birds appeared to be over four feet tall and have a wingspan of over six feet. They were all white except for dark legs, dirty, dull-yellow bill, and black and red on face. The black extended to the eye and extend above and below the eye with red on the forehead. The colors were difficult to assess at the distance involved. The bill was long and pointed. The legs were stout and feet appear large. The feathers toward the rear appeared fluffy, and I could not make out a tail. I did not see the eye color. The birds were feeding or resting in the morning. In the afternoon we saw dancing—jumping up and down and making short flights with wings spread. At this time we could see the black wing tips.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: During the day we saw Iowa's other large white birds with black wing tips—American White Pelican, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose—which are smaller and of totally different shapes.

Any one have reservations?: No.

Light: heavy overcast and light rain a.m., partly sunny p.m.; **Distance:** see above; **Optics:** 10x binocular, 20x scope, 560mm lens.

Previous experience: I have seen this species in Texas several times.

References before/after viewing: National Geographic Guide after field notes.

Time of notes: during observation periods; **Final typing:** 1 day.

99-11

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Whooping Crane (6 Adult)

LOCATION: Between 335th and York, west of Italy Sts. Just west of DeSoto NWR (Harrison)

DATE: 10 April, 1999 (7:15-45 and 11:30-45 AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHERS: I was with Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault. There were Mob that day and the next two days.

BACKGROUND: A strong low pressure storm system had moved through Iowa 36-48 hours previously. These birds were reported by personnel at the De Soto NWR as being seen at this location on 9 April. We arrived early in the morning to find the birds in a large field roughly in the middle of a section of land. They were easily scoped from several directions.

DESCRIPTION: Although the birds were quite a distance (roughly 500 yards) they could be seen well in the telescope. There were six adult birds that were all white except for head markings and long black legs. The neck was long and thick, and the body was bulky with a short tail. There was no way to compare their size to any other bird. I estimated them to be about 5-6 feet tall when standing erect. Red on the top of the head and lower side of the head could be seen at times, and the long yellow chisel-shaped bill was also visible. When they flapped their wings, black primaries on the wing tips could be seen. The birds were actively feeding much of the time, but they did the dancing display with wing-flapping and jumping at times. In fact, at one point, all six of the birds were dancing at the same time.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Adult Sandhill Cranes are smaller, gray, or gray and brown, with red only on the top of the head and a gray bill.

VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was a partly cloudy day with strong winds. Viewing was with a KOWA TSN-4 (20-60 X zoom) from the southwest (viewing northeast) and northwest (viewing southeast) at distances estimated to be about 500 yards.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen this species three previous times at Aransas NWR in Texas.

REFERENCES & FIELD NOTES:

Field notes at the time and this form was typed on 11 April. National Geographic Guide was consulted.

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Whooping Crane

Number: 6

Location: East of DeSoto Bend NWR in southwestern Harrison County, Iowa.

Habitat: Agricultural field and drainage ditch.

Date and time: April 11, 8:45 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Name and address: Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317

Others with you: Mary Edwards

Others before or after you:

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.

Very tall, long-legged wading birds. There were no other birds nearby for size comparison, but they appeared to be larger than a Sandhill Crane or Great Blue Heron. Immaculate white plumage except for black primary tips seen in flight, and red and black facial markings. The facial markings consisted of a blackish moustachial stripe and a black forehead grading to bright red on the crown. The bill was long and straight, and appeared dark greenish or gray in color. The legs and feet were black. The birds were seen foraging in a field and a nearby drainage ditch and were seen briefly in flight. No vocalizations were heard.

Similar species eliminated: Sandhill Cranes are smaller, gray, and lack a moustachial stripe and black primaries.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No.

Viewing conditions: Estimated 200 yards, overcast, viewed with 8x40 binoculars and 15x telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have seen Whooping Cranes on one trip to Texas and have seen many Sandhill Cranes.

References and persons consulted before writing description: *National Geographic* field guide.

How long before field notes made: During observation.

How long before this form completed: 9 hours.