

Gyr Falcon
20 Jan 1992
Bettendorf, Scott Co., IA
*Timper
IBL 62:54, 63:70

Record Number: 92-02
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Edward Timper, 1131 31st St., Bettendorf, IA 52722 (6/30/92)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 62:54
Records Committee: IBL 63:70

VOTE: 6 NA, 1 A-D

NA, The description of the plumage does not rule out entirely Prairie or Peregrine. Dull light brown of upper plumage favors a Prairie Falcon more than a Gyr Falcon. Dark brown flight feathers with light margins can be a Prairie Falcon. Finely barred tail feathers also favors a Prairie. A light malar stripe fits either falcon but I think it favors a Prairie Falcon. I can't accept the document without some doubt.

A-D, The size of the bird and the description of the plumage especially the head well describes a gyrfalcon. Mr. Timper's experience with falcons has to be considered a plus with this sighting. For a first state record, however, I would have liked more detail on the "jizz" particularly the proportions of this heavier bodied, broader winged falcon that distinguish it from Prairie and Peregrine.

NA, This is a believable record. This is a time of year when Gyr Falcon might occur in Iowa. Further, we have an observer who evidently has substantial experience with this and other falcon species. Unfortunately, we must consider this record from the details provided. While there is some excellent description of the bird, I was unable to find any diagnostic field marks that convincingly separate this from other falcons.

NA, The 22" length supports a immature gray-phased Gyr Falcon, but the other characteristics reported: 1) dull light brown back with light buff on feather edges, 2) dark brown flight feathers with light margins, 3) dark brown vertical streaking on the breast, 4) striped tail concolor with the back with light colored tip, and 5) light malar patch are not diagnostic. In fact, the reported characteristics are more supportive of immature Prairie and Peregrine Falcon. I think the blue-gray cere and legs make this falcon an immature, but am unable to separate it from the other large falcon immatures. The size is too subjective to use as a diagnostic field mark especially when both Prairie and Peregrine females match the size of male Gyrfalcons.

NA, I don't know the observer. The description is quite detailed. I can't judge whether this description was influenced by talking with Pete Petersen or viewing books. Why was this bird seen only once? I have no idea about the possibility of this bird belonging to another falconer. I could vote A-D, A-E, or NA on this one.

NA, This is an interesting record but more details are needed to be beyond reasonable doubt on this species, so rare in the

state. Was there or how much was the wing vs. tail overlap. Light wing tips on dark flight feathers seems wrong for this species. What about barring on the flanks? No mention of two toned underwing, flight feathers vs. coverts? Was there a superciliary? Y or N; mustache mark? Y or N. Was there a head pattern? How finely barred was the tail, width of bars, light dark areas. This could be a gyrfalcon but I need more info to be sure.

NA, While this is suggestive of a Gyrfalcon, I have some doubts about this and wish more details had been submitted to analyze. I'm not certain that an immature female Peregrine Falcon of the tundra form which has a thin mustache mark, wide buffy edges to its brown back feathers, and other similar shared descriptive characteristics of this possible gyrfalcon was not seen instead. Size alone, which can be subjective, is the lone factor pointing to a gyrfalcon with the details provided. I wish more descriptive details of the plumage seen in flight could have been provided. Also, I'm not certain that an immature female Prairie Falcon has been eliminated from consideration. They appear darker and have a narrow mustache mark and could fit the description provided. I wish more comparison with similar species could have been addressed in the documentation. With these doubts I must vote NA.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

92-02

What species? Gyr Falcon (Falco Rusticolus) How many? One

Location? Devils Glen & Middle Road, Bettendorf, Hwy Z30 & Indiana Ave, Rural Scott Cty.

Type of Habitat? Residential with fields, and rural farm area with picked fields

When? date(s): 20 January 1992 time: 1:45 pm to 3:15 pm

Who? your name and address: Edward Timper, President, Iowa Falconers Association
1121 31st Street Bettendorf, Iowa 52722 (319) 355-0490

Others with you: Alone

Others before or after you: None to my knowledge have positively identified this raptor

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.

I first observed the falcon in flight, and from the large size and the typical falcon shape was certain it was a gyrfalcon. I went home, and being a falconer, went out to search for the falcon with the idea of attempting to capture it. I found it on a fence post where I had seen it land and placed my harness out for it. It came into the pigeon, but would not sieze it. I observed it during this time through a pair of 10X50 binoculars at a distance of about 50 feet. It was not banded.

This was a typical male gerfalcon app. 22" long, the general color of the upper plumage was dull light brown, with all contour feathers margined with a light buff edge. The flight feathers were darker brown with light margins on the tips. The tail was the same base color of the back, but was finely barred with a light colored tip. The breast was a light buff colored base, with longitudinal streaks of darker brown, which gave the bird an appearance of being solid brown from a distance. It had a dark brown eye, a light malar stripe, and a general ashy brown tone to the head with fine flecks. The cere was a dull grey blue color, and the beak had the typical falcon notch with a dark tip. The feet were an ashey grey blue, similar to the cere. This was definitely an immature male gerfalcon. I heard no calls during the time I observed him. (over)

Similar species, how eliminated:

I am a master falconer, and have handled and flown many large falcons, including gyrfalcons, peregrines, prairie falcons, and large exotics such as saker falcons and lanners. I am positive that this is a gerfalcon.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment. - see above PR also.
General overcast day, with good light levels. I observed the falcon flying and siting. from various ranges, but as close as twenty feet during a slow speed drive by to place my capture device.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

See Above.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Personnal experience, and talked with Pete Petersen in regards to filing this report.

How long before field notes made? Same Day this form completed? 4 February 1992

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

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What species? Gyrfalcon (Falco Rusticolus) How many? One

Where? He had a typical falcon silhouette, with the pointed tapered wings,

Type of habitat? Residential with fields, and rural farm area with picked fields

When? (date): 20 January 1992 Time: 1:45 pm to 2:15 pm

What your name and address: Edward Timmer, President, Iowa Falconers Association, 1122 1/2 State Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50319 (515) 282-1800

Others with you: Alice

Others before or after you: None to my knowledge have positively identified this report.

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

I first observed the falcon in flight, and from the large size and the typical falcon shape was certain it was a gyrfalcon. I went home, and being a falconer, went out to search for the falcon with the idea of attempting to capture it. I found it on a fence post where I had seen it land and placed my harpoon out for it. It came into the pigeon, but would not seize it. I observed it during this time through a pair of 10X30 binoculars at a distance of about 50 feet. It was not handled.

This was a typical male gyrfalcon app. 22" long, the general color of the upper plumage was dull light brown, with all contour feathers margined with a light buff edge. The light feathers were darker brown with light margins on the tips. The tail was the same base color of the back, but was finely barred with a light colored tip. The breast was a light buff colored band, with longitudinal streaks of darker brown, which gave the bird an appearance of being solid brown from a distance. It had a dark brown eye, a light nasal stripe, and a general ashy brown tone to the head with fine black. The cere was a dull grey blue color, and the beak had the typical falcon notch with a dark tip. The feet were an ashy grey blue, similar to the cere. This was definitely an immature male gyrfalcon. I heard no calls during the time I observed him. (over)

I am a master falconer, and have handled and flown many large falcons, including gyrfalcons, peregrines, prairie falcons, and large eagles such as saker falcons and lambers. I am positive that this is a gyrfalcon.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: fine lighting, distance (how measured), optimal equipment.
General overview: day, with good light levels. I observed the falcon flying and sitting, from various ranges, but as close as twenty feet during a slow speed drive by to place my capture device.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: See Above.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Personal experience, and talked with Pete Peterson in regards to fitting

How long before field notes made? Same day this form completed? 4 February 1992

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