

Gyrfalcon
2 Jan 1995
Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co., IA
*Matthew Kenne
IBL 65:48, 66:97

Record Number: 95-02
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Matthew Kenne, 209 N. Phillips, Algona 50511 [7/4/95]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:48
Records Committee: IBL 66:97

VOTE: 2 A-D, 5 NA

NA, The general description and flight characteristics fit gyrfalcon but documentation lacks details that would allow me to accept the record without reservation. In addition, the sighting was brief, into the sun, and at a considerable distance.

NA, Although I don't discount the high probability of a Gyrfalcon because of the size and jizz, I don't think viewing conditions were good enough to call this accidental raptor based on such a short view.

NA, Certainly suggestive but I'm uncomfortable with short observation time for a bird that is identified by lack of outstanding field marks.

NA, I have trouble knowing what someone else could see during 20 seconds at one-half mile through a scope. Other hawks could have the appearance of a falcon, especially if it were windy. The description sounds good for a Gyrfalcon, but the chance of being deceived under these conditions makes me cautious when such a rare bird is involved.

A-D, Wing and tail shape is right, color is right, size is right for Gyrfalcon. Distance of observation is pretty far but this record seems beyond doubt to me.

NA, Although Matt may have seen one, I thought his report lacked details.

A-D, Description is convincing by a careful observer; tail length, broadness of wings at their bases, and flight "jizz" are notable features seen.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

95-02

What species? Gyr falcon How many? 1
Location? Red Rock Reservoir, Marion Co. above the dam
Type of Habitat? flyover the ice
When? date(s): Jan 2, 1995 time: 1:10 PM to
Who? your name and address: Matthew Kenne 709 N. Phillips Algona, Ia 50511
Others with you: none
Others 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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

While scanning the iceline above Red Rock dam from White breast (the ramp straight ahead from the entrance) I spotted a raptor crossing the lake from far shore to near. It was at about the midpoint on the line from E of the marina to E of white breast.

It appeared to be the same size as nearby Herring Gulls. The bird was dark gray, and although the underside was in shadow and the bright white background probably made the bird look darker, there was no visible pattern as there was on gulls and Bald Eagles. It "absorbed" light like a Black Hole.

The wings of the bird were wide at the base, wider proportionally than those of other falcons, and tapered to a blunt point. they were →
Similar species; how eliminated: ^{over}

The lack of facial pattern and white throat and chest rule out Peregrine, as the bird was flying almost directly into the sun (perpendicular to me). It wasn't as pale or brown as a Prairie, and with shadow and distance there wasn't any dark/light pattern to the underwing. It wasn't black as a crow + the shape was wrong. Eagles were patterned + obviously larger.
Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NA
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

full sun through 35x spotting scope ~~1/2 mile ±~~ 1/2 mile ±
(long distance) estimated from map, these reservoir views confuse me!

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I have personal experience with all of Iowa's regular raptors except Golden Eagle, but none with Gyr falcon.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

none

How long before field notes made? 30 min. this form completed? 7 hrs.

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

bent back slightly at the wrist, but not as much as on the gulls. The tail was long and thick. The wing-strokes were seemingly slow, ~~but~~ but the bird covered the distance very fast. It flew level, about 1-2 wing spreads (<10 ft.) above the ice with 1 short glide breaking the otherwise constant flapping.

I watched the bird for about 20 sec. or so before it flew out of sight into the cove where the road goes down to the water east from Whitecrest entrance. I waited 5 minutes to see if the bird would come back out over the ice before I drove down to where it disappeared, but I never found it.

(This section contains bleed-through text from the reverse side of the page, including phrases like "The bird was dark gray", "I waited 5 minutes", and "I never found it.")