

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) 2. Number: 1

3. Location Brookside Park, Ames, Iowa

4. Date: 5/4/78 5. Time Bird seen: 10930 to 0945

6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):

white eye line, yellow throat that ended very abruptly with white belly. Very distinctive black spotted streaks on sides. Two white wing bars and dark back.

7. Description of voice, if heard:

8. Description of behavior:

foraging - flying in and around small branches - stopped on branch several times to just look around

9. Habitat - general: openwoods on edge of thick woods.

specific:

found in hickberry tree (*Celtis occidentalis*).

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:

magnolia warbler - no white belly
Blackburnian " - no yellow throat

11. Distance (how measured)? 50 ft estimation

12. Optical equipment: 7x35 wide angle Binoculars

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):

sun was behind me and bird was in front.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:

never seen this species before. seen many other warblers. ornithology lab

15. Other observers:

none at this time

at ISU.

16. Did the others agree with your identification?

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Ellen Johnson 4 days later.

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Birds of North America, Robins et al. - no influence in this description except for comparison with other species.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 4 days

Signature Gary Friedrichs Address: Cavh 7326 Hanson, ISU.

Date: 5/9/78 City, State: Ames, Iowa

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, there really is no need to describe your observations in writing. But, if you have seen something unusual and want to share this experience with others, a written description is essential. It is true your immediate friends who know and respect your ability probably will accept your report without question, but what about those who do not know you, particularly the bird students 100 years from now who cannot know you? Also, what about the habitual skeptics? And most importantly, what about the compilers of regional bird lists who probably will insist that records be scientifically sound? All these critics will investigate your observation not because they assume you are wrong, but merely because they ordinarily expect verification. Whether the individual demanding verification realizes it or not, in doing so, he is employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

If your observation involves a common species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season, verification is not obtained easily and special documentation is necessary. The best documentation is a collected specimen, and many bird students insist this is the only acceptable evidence. However, others recognize the importance and reliability of sight records accumulated by the experienced field observer, and maintain that even extraordinary sight records are acceptable if accompanied by an adequate verifying description.

It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

It should also be pointed out that with the great photographic equipment now available, species identification from photographs are possible. Such species documentation are highly desirable and should be sent to the state editors or to large museums.