

Middlewestern Prairie Region
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

Late Sighting

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Northern Parula Warbler 2. Number: one
 3. Location Brookside Park - Ames - Story County, Iowa
 4. Date: 10 October, 1982 5. Time Bird seen: abt 10 AM ~~to~~ for abt 30 sec.
 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):
Warbler - bluish-gray head and back - darker wings and tail. throat and upper breast bright yellow; lower breast, belly, and under tail coverts very white; prominent white wing bars. No marks or streaks on back or breast.
 7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard
 8. Description of behavior: 'feeding' or foraging among branches of tree
 9. Habitat - general: forest with some area with all underbrush cut and grass mowed.
specific: In tree at edge of more ~~natural~~ natural forest area.
 10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
female Common Yellowthroat doesn't have wing bars and is brownish on head & back.
Nashville Warbler doesn't have wing bars; back isn't grayish; yellow extends way down the front.
 11. Distance (how measured)?
40 to 50 feet
 12. Optical equipment:
8 X 50 binoculars
 13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
sunny ; sun at my back as I was looking at bird.
 14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
Saw twelve others of this species this fall.
 15. Other observers:
 16. Did the others agree with your identification?
 17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
 18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
A Field Guide to The Birds Peterson
This bird showed no trace of a 'bar' across chest.
 19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
This was typed 30 October from notes written about two hours after the observation.
Carl Montminy Address: 1120 Marston
- Signature _____
Date: 30 October 1982 City, State: Ames, Iowa

(over)

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.