

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Yellow-throated Warbler 2. Number: 1  
3. Location Wildcat Den State Park, Muscatine Co., Iowa  
4. Date: May 14, 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 10:20 to 10:35 A.M.C.D.T.

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):

Throat yellow, extending to upper breast, lower breast + belly whitish, flanks white streaked with black. White mark above eye from bill to back of head, white spot behind eye + tiny bit of white below eye. Back gray, wings grayish-black, 2 white wing bars, head black above bill, paler at back.

7. Description of voice, if heard: Loud series of notes. see 10.

8. Description of behavior: Sang from exposed perches, not feeding

9. Habitat - general: creek bottom - juncture of Pine Creek + small stream coming from Devil's Punchbowl.  
specific: bottomland forest, large clearing, trees well spaced, surrounded by more dense forest.

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
Blackburnian Warbler ♀ - orange through eye, different call (reminded me of Le. Waterthrush which was calling from lower areas nearby at the time.

11. Distance (how measured)? 40-100'

12. Optical equipment: 10X35 zoom binocs, 20X85 scope used once.

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):  
Overcast, bird seen 5 times in different positions.

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Have seen about 10 times previously, chiefly in the south. Saw one year ago at Credit Island.

15. Other observers: none

16. Did the others agree with your identification? —

\* 17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: see below

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
checked Robbins upon return to car, this confirmed my id.

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 30 min?

Signature Peter C. Petersen Address: 235 W. Callan Blvd

Date: May 14, 1979 City, State: Davenport, Iowa 52803

\* 5/16 - I now understand Tom (over) Hart of Iowa City has seen the bird.

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.

17. Often observers who independently identified this bird: see below

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description:  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State: \_\_\_\_\_

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