

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Townsend's Solitaire 2. Number: One
3. Location Southern Iowa - Corydon. north east part of town
4. Date: March 17-18 & 27 5. Time Bird seen: 11:30 AM to 11:35 AM - 17th
4:00 P.M. the 18th & 4:00 PM the 27th
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): Slightly smaller than Robin, gray body, large light eye ring, short dark bill, buffy marks on wings, notched tail with white sides.
7. Description of voice, if heard: didn't hear it
8. Description of behavior: observed for only short periods of time sitting on branches of trees
9. Habitat - general: trees around yard - olive, pear, apple, oak.
specific: Russian olive
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Catbirds - have black caps, brown undertail, didn't have large amount of white on wings like a mockingbird
11. Distance (how measured)? about 30 feet stepped it off. 12. Optical equipment: binoculars
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Looking North all days and times the sky was overcast.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: none with Solitaire different years we have had Catbirds in trees & shrubs.
15. Other observers: Betty J. Mulner
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: anyone else is unknown
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
"National Geographic Society Song and Garden Birds of North America"
"A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America"
I looked through both books for gray birds with white tail sides as this was how I first saw the bird without binoculars. The Townsend was only bird that was all gray with white tail sides.
- Signature Kay Mulner Address: 411 North Johnson
- Date: March 28, 1977 City, State: Corydon, Iowa 50060

MIDDLEWESTERN BIRDS REGION
(LOW, MISSOURI, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, KENTUCKY, OHIO)

STEPS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

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.