

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 (one)
3. Location Credit Island Park, Davenport, Scott Co. Iowa
4. Date: 5/13/78 5. Time Bird seen: 9:30 to 9:32 AM CDT
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): medium-large wood warbler, s. endocia shape, throat and upper breast bright yellow, white below. Two white wing bars on gray, sides white with short black streaks. Area of back visible (not much, seemed <sup>med.</sup> gray). White supercilious, black patch around & behind eye with a bit of light (white or yellow) just below eye. Tail not noted. Bill seemed dark, leg color not noted
7. Description of voice, if heard: silent
8. Description of behavior: hopped from branch to branch foraging.
9. Habitat - general: Bottomland Forest, understory cleared.  
specific: dead tree (sp?), and oak just leafing out
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
Blackburnian - ~~no~~ orange or yellow stripe through eye. No single long wing bar  
Cercoea - ~~is~~ also eliminated this species.
11. Distance (how measured)? 100 - est. 12. Optical equipment: 10x binocs
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): O.C. - light rain, bird at about a 45° angle or less - background was other trees.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: Have seen the bird frequently (15+ times) to the south.
15. Other observers: Elton Faubus
16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: none to my knowledge
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Robbins checked briefly after observation to rule other warblers.
19. Time elapsed before write-ups for #6 + 10, about 12 hours - handwritten answers  
Remainder of sheet completed the next day.

Peter Petersen

Address: 235 McClellan Blvd.

Signature

Date: 5-14-78

City, State: Davenport, Iowa 52803



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.