

Burrowing Owl
20 Dec 1986
Rathbun Res., Appanoose Co., IA
*Strough, *Cummins, *S. Dinsmore
also 28 Dec; IBL 57:46, 56, 78

Record Number: 86-35
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Randal D. Strough, 20 Dec
Ray Cummins, 20 Dec
Steve Dinsmore, 28 Dec

REFERENCES

Christmas Bird Count: IBL 57:46
Field Reports: IBL 57:56
Records Committee: IBL 57:78

VOTE: 4-II, 3-III

III, Documentations by Stough and Cummins are excellent (especially Cummins). Briefer look by Dinsmore yielded fewer details, except only he mentioned dark chinstrap.

II, Documentations eliminate any other possibilities.

II, Certainly unusual time for this species.

III, Mention of leg length, habitat and actions convincing. Seen also by others. Was it ever photographed?

86-35

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

86-35

by the Records Committee

of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: *Burrowing Owl*

DATE SEEN: *12-20-86*

SITE OF OBSERVATION: *Rothbun Res.*

OBSERVERS: *Strough, Cummins, S. Dinsmore*

DATE OF REVIEW: *5-30-87*

METHOD OF REVIEW: *Vote*

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: *II*

COMMENTS:

Certainly an unusual time of the year for this species but very well documented.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

86-35

What species? Burrowing Owl Athene cunicularia How many? one

Location? Appanoose County, Lake Rathbun, 1.5 miles North on paved road to Southfork Marina off J5T

Type of Habitat? Open; harvested bean field west side of road, harvested corn field east side of road. The ditches were mowed clean of weeds and lacked trees or shrubs

When? date(s): December 20, 1986 time: 1645 to 1705

Who? your name and address: Randal D Strough, Box 273, Moravia, Iowa 52571

Others with you: Ray Cummins, Centerville, Iowa

Others before or after you: no one to my knowledge

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A small earless owl about the size of a screech owl. Head round with small white spots on forehead extending down back, background was brownish in color. White eyebrows forming a "V", and thin white band about the throat. With horizontal barring on the belly. Legs were long and covered with feathers, observed while standing on fence post(s). Tail very short, hardly noticeable. When in flight the owl had long narrow wings, flapped and glided to the next perch.

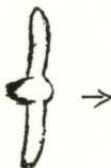


Diagram of wing shape when in flight.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Screech Owl: a screech owl has ear tufts (except young screech owls may lack conspicuous ear tufts). The belly has vertical barring, and lacks definite spots on head and back. Legs are not conspicuously long.

Saw-whet Owl: has vertical streaked belly, and lacks conspicuously long legs. Habitat: conifer groves, there where none in the immediate area.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? yes

If yes, explain. It was my first experience with a sighting of this nature, an accidental. I could see that it was a burrowing owl, but the fact that it was miles from its normal range and time of year caused me to almost disbelieve. When positively identified I had no more doubts.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

refer to back of page

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Observed a pair of burrowing owls nesting in Northeastern Utah near Woodruff Reservoir, during the summer of 1984. I have observed screech owls in Iowa and Missouri. Also, study skins & mounts. No previous experience with the saw-whet owl.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Description based on observations during sighting. Consulted with Ray Cummins while observing the owl and also referred to Peterson's Field Guide to confirm our identification.

How long before field notes made? 1/2 hour this form completed? December 23, 1986

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

VIEWING CONDITIONS:

The light was fading but adequate. The owl was first observed from 20 feet for approximately three minutes. It then flew to another fence post and we observed it from about 40 feet for about 10 minutes. It then flew again unnoticed. We found that it had flown across the road to another fence post the same distance away. We observed it for approximately seven minutes. We had it positively identified by this time and in attempting to agitate it to observe its behavior, it flew and its flight was noted. We lost sight of it in the corn field. As we left the area heading south we observed what we feel was the same owl sitting on a post between a quarter to a half mile away from the first sighting. It had been approximately five minutes since we lost track of it.

We used Bushnell Spotting Scope and binoculars 7-15 X 35 zoom. Distances were approximated by visual observation and land marks, i.e. road ditch widths.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What Species? Burrowing Owl How Many? 1

Location? Appanoose Co. on blacktop to South Fork Marina 500yds s. of a curve.

Type of Habitat? Flat open picked corn with fence on both sides of road

When? date(s): Dec. 20, 1986 time: 4:45 to 5:05

Who? your name and address: Ray Cummins 609 S. Main St. Centerville, Iowa 52544

Others with you: Randy Strough Moravia, Iowa

Others before or after you: None that I know of

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, & feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Small owl about same height as Screech Owl but thinner; eyes had yellow irises with dark pupils; head had no ear tufts, white eyebrow lines over each eye, lacked any black broaders around face, crown was flat and finely spectacled with white; bird appeared to lack a neck; back from crown to tail was light brown with white spots the spots were bigger on the back than the crown; wings and tail ended together making the tail appear very short, both were same color as back; throat was mostly tucked in but some pure white feathers could be seen; breast and belly were horizontally barred with a color that was slightly more rusty looking than the back this barring became more blotched from belly to throat; the lower leg was 1/3 the height of the body. The bird was hunting from a fence post, when it flew it's flight was direct and low, once it land on a corn stock before returning to the fence row.

Similar species how eliminated: No eartufts, horizontal barring, and long legs eliminated all other similar species.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment. light was fair but more than adequate for the distance 5 to 30 yds, 20x spotting scope and 10x binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: first sighting of Burrowing Owl, regularly see Horned, Barred, Screech, and Shorteared in area have seen Saw Whet and Longeared in Iowa.

Reference and persons consulted before writing description:
Peterson's Field Guide during observation only

How long before field notes made? 1min this form completed? 36 hrs

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species?Burrowing Owl

How Many?1 ad.

Location?South Fork Area of Rathbun Res., Appanoose Co.

Habitat?the bird was roosting in a burrow in a ditch

Date?28 Dec 1986

Time?2:30-2:32 P.M.

Observers Name and address:Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird:Ray Cummins and Tom Johnson

Description of bird:The size, profile, and head shape easily identified the bird as a small owl. The birds upperparts and head were light brown. The facial disks were also brown, but lighter than the rest of the head. The bird also had a conspicuous dark chinstrap below the bill. The underparts were light with darker horizontal bars throughout. I could not see the long legs because the bird was crouched at the entrance to its burrow. After I watched the bird for a couple of minutes, the bird disappeared into the burrow and was not seen again.

Similar species and how eliminated:The small size, dark chin, and horizontal bars on the underparts eliminates all other owls.

Viewing conditions and equipment:Viewing conditions were good with the sky heavily overcast. Estimated viewing distance was 30-40 feet. I used Nikon 8 x 23 binoculars and a Buschnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species:I have seen two other Burrowing Owls in Iowa plus several in Florida and Wyoming.

References consulted:NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made?immediately

How long before this form was completed?16 hours