

3/4/81
Accepted by Fred

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- Species Pine Grosbeak 2. Number: one
3. Location Story County, Ames, 4024 Arkansas Drive
4. Date: 28 February 1981 5. Time Bird seen: 7:10 to 7:20 a.m.
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):
Approximately the size of Rose-breasted Grosbeak, distinctly larger than typical sparrows, rather chunky body build, finch-like conical bill, distinct light colored wing bars noted. Body color- pinkish wash to head, upper breast, and fore part of back region, hind half of body basically brownish colored with some white color, ie not solid brown
7. Description of voice, if heard: loud whistle, distinctly 2 noted (not 3 as described in Robbins), and somewhat suggestive of yellowlegs as mentioned by Robbins, We listened
8. Description of behavior: sat on wire and called to Peterson record next day and the call matched that on the record.
9. Habitat - general: Urban, sat in tree and then
specific: on wire, finally flew toward nearby wooded creek bottom area
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
Purple Finch-too large and had distinct wing bars
Redpoll- again too large, no distinct red cap
Cardinal-no crest, body too chunky, bill not red, too much red on body for female
for all three, the calls were not correct
11. Distance (how measured)? 10 to 40 feet, estimated 12. Optical equipment: 7 x 30 binocs
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):
overcast and not good light but still good enough to see the colors distinctly
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
none
15. Other observers: Steve saw it first and identified it correctly, JJD agreed with Steve's identification
16. Did the others agree with your identification?
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
none-flew off before others could be notified
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Robbins et al size and general color were okay although this bird did not have as much pink on it as in the figure in Robbins
see 7 above for comments on call
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?
originally written 4 hours later, retyped on 2 March
- Steve Dimmore Gene Dimmore Address: 4024 Arkansas Drive
Signature
- Date: 2 March 1981 City, State: Ames, Iowa

Middlewestern Field Station
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

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.