

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

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) 2. Number: 1
3. Location Brookside Park, Ames, Iowa. (N.W. 1/4, Sec. 3, T83N, R24W, Story Co., Iowa)
4. Date: 3 May 1979 5. Time Bird seen: 0730 to 0732
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): The bird, approximately 18 ~~cm~~ long, was sitting broadside to the observers approximately 1 meter off the ground. Plumage was entirely red, eye black, and beak light colored. Foot coloration was not noted. The beak was rather large and thick. The bird was approximately "robin sized" but slightly more slender.
7. Description of voice, if heard: Not heard.
8. Description of behavior: sitting on a low branch in a small opening in the brushy understory.
9. Habitat - general: Riparian hardwoods  
specific: Mixed hardwoods with brushy understory in the Squaw Creek flood plain.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
Scarlet Tanager: This bird did not have black wings or tail.  
Hepatic Tanager: This bird did not have a dark bill or dark check.
11. Distance (how measured)? 10 meters
12. Optical equipment: 10x50 Binoculars
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): Clear sky. Light on the bird moderate and even. Sun behind me as I viewed the bird.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: First sighting of this species. I have seen Scarlet Tanagers and Western Tanagers.
15. Other observers: Ted LaGrange, Warren Case, Donna Chickerling
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes.
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Lynn Braband saw this species (but not necessarily the same individual) on 2 May 1979 at about the same location.
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: Consulted "Robbins, C.S., B. Braun, and H.S. Zim, 1966. Birds of North America. Golden Press, N.Y. 340 pp."  
Used this book to confirm identification in consultation with other observers as we watched the bird and after it flew out of sight.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 1 week.

V. Pat McCrow  
Signature

Address: 1362 Hawthorn Ct.

Date: 10 May 1979

City, State: Ames, Iowa 50010



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.

12. Other observers: Ted LaGrange, Warner Case, Bruce Chickering  
13. Did the editors agree with your identification?  
14. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Lynn Bradford says this  
15. Editor's instructions and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description?  
16. Editor's "Editorial Board" (Mrs. S. B. Brown, and Mrs. S. M. 1966 Bird of North  
17. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?  
18. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?  
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State: \_\_\_\_\_