

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: One
3. Location Ames, Iowa Wooded park ~~along~~ near stream
4. Date: May 2, 1979 5. Time Bird seen: approx. 9:30 A.M. for about 5 min. to \_\_\_\_\_
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-sized all red bird without crest and lacking black wings and tail.
7. Description of voice, if heard: Not heard
8. Description of behavior: Sitting on ~~branch~~ branches of large tree. Occasionally would fly to another tree.
9. Habitat - general: Woodland (open)  
specific: Large trees, no understory, short grass
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
Cardinal - no crest nor black face  
Scarlet Tanager - no black wings nor tail
11. Distance (how measured)? 20-30 yards (estimated) 12. Optical equipment: 7x35 binoculars
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):  
Overcast drizzle
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:  
I have seen numerous Cardinals and several Scarlet Tanagers. This was my first summer tanager sighting.
15. Other observers:  
5 or 6 undergraduate ornithology students
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:  
Pat McCrow observed the species in the same area the next day
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
Petersen's A Field guide to the Birds Robbin et al. A ~~field guide to~~ field identification: Birds of North America. Consulted in the field (with bird still present) to verify Scarlet and Summer Tanager differences
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 5 days

Lynn Brabant  
Signature

Address: Dept. Animal Ecology, ISU, IA

Date: 5-7-79 City, State: Ames, Iowa 50011

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.

1. Name of bird (scientific name) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date of observation \_\_\_\_\_

3. Location (state, county, town, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Time of day \_\_\_\_\_

5. Nature of observation (sight, sound, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Description of bird (color, size, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of observer \_\_\_\_\_

8. Address of observer \_\_\_\_\_

9. City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

10. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

11. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

12. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

13. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

14. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

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19. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_

20. Name of state editor \_\_\_\_\_