

Nov 29, 1985

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WM

Dear Marion,

I don't know who would advise you not to document a bird because of its rarity. It sounds like terrible advise to me.

The decision to document should be made when the bird is seen. The first thing I do when I see an unusual bird is to make notes and a sketch if possible. Immediate notes made before looking at any books are invaluable.

Maybe he/she meant to advise you not to send the documentation in. The only reason I can think of for not sending it in is that you (or he/she) was unsure of the identification. Another possible reason for not sending in a record is that you failed to make notes and, therefore, do not have the evidence to convince the records committee. Not having taken field notes does not exclude the possibility of acceptance, it just makes it more difficult for the committee and lowers the chances of acceptance. If you didn't make field notes, I would strongly urge you to carry paper and pen or a tape recorder when you go birding. One can never tell when a rarity is going to be seen.

Some people may not turn in a documentation for fear of it being rejected. This seems like a weak excuse to me. It's true that some birders are better at writing down their observations than others, and thus may expose their skills. However, I think the biggest factor in the quality of documentations relates to taking notes immediately and learning from the observations you didn't make.

It's difficult to tell how many records are submitted when the reporter has some doubt (in order to see if the committee will accept the record). However, it is clear that some records that the reporter is certain of will be rejected because the committee has less to judge from than the observer. At least, this has happened to me on several occasions. I have also had records turned down because the sighting was too brief and incomplete, but this does not negate the value of reviewing the record.

Your report of the swan this spring illustrates the value of the reporting process (if you haven't received feedback on this yet, you will shortly). No one was sure of the ID from the description alone; however, the notes you made of foot color, plus the photo showing the relation of black to eye, identified the bird as an immature Tundra Swan (I missed the ID, but several others went beyond the field guides for a better description). I made a similar, although much worse mistake, when I called a Mew Gull a Laughing Gull. Anyway, as you can see I believe in the review process and try not to let my ego get involved.

Normally, any accidental bird that is reported gets reviewed. However, it sounds like you are not reporting this bird, just mentioning it. Unless I hear from you further, I will assume you don't want it reviewed (The choice is really yours, not mine). If you have field notes, you should submit the original or a good xerox copy.

With best regards,