

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

10RC # 1984.019

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Scrub Jay 2. Number: one (1)
3. Location south pines Illinois Beach State Park Lake County
4. Date: November 29-30, 1984 5. Time Bird seen: varied 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):  
Bill: black; Back: gray; Wings: blue with dark feather edgings;  
Legs and feet: black;  
Tail: long; blue on top, black underneath;  
Head: blue, with black eye stripe and grayish cheek patch; Lores: black;  
Throat and upper chest: dull white streaked with gray, ending in a gray, circular line across chest;  
Lower underparts: gray White area in eyebrow not observed.
7. Description of voice, if heard: see attached page
8. Description of behavior: furtive and elusive; moving to oaks to retrieve acorns, the bird would return to the pines for security and eating; was not
9. Habitat - general: cooperative in allowing close looks or long  
specific: managed prairie and <sup>views</sup> pine woods
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
Gray-breasted Jay: observed bird had conspicuous demarcation between upper chest and lower underparts, lacking in Gray-breasted Jay. Also, distress calls recorded on tapes (commercial) similar to Scrub Jay.
11. Distance (how measured)? 40-100 yards 12. Optical equipment: 10x35 Nikon
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): clear and sunny
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: have seen many in California
15. Other observers: R. Biss, C. Monday, M. Biss, m. ob.
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird:
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
Bird reported 11-29-84 by R. Chapel and party from Urbana, Il.  
Photographs could not be obtained since bird would not move into open area or stay in any single place more than a few seconds. Did not consort with Blue Jays present.
19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? November 30, 1984

Signature James E. Landing  
Date: November 30, 1984

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Vocalization of the Scrub Jay at Illinois Beach State Park, 11-29-84  
James E. Landing

On Nov. 29, 1984, I was informed by Richard Biss that a Scrub Jay had been discovered by R. Chapel and party in the Il. Beach State Park. Richard and I met at the south end of the Park about 4:00 PM and, for nearly 1½ hours, got limited looks at the bird. During this period we heard, on several occasions, a two-note distress type jay call which we assumed was coming from Blue Jays in the area. Later, we actually confirmed the fact that the call was coming from the Scrub Jay, so closer attention was paid. We mutually decided that, based on what we heard, little difference could be discerned between the call of the Scrub Jay and a similar two-note distress call commonly given by Blue Jays.

Upon returning home that evening, the Peterson "western" field guide tapes were played, and calls of both Scrub, Blue, and other jays were studied. Many jays give a similar two-note distress call, and the one we had heard earlier in the day from the Scrub Jay was captured on the Peterson tape. This particular distress call was so similar to other jays on the tape it was decided that the call, by itself, was not too diagnostic.

At 9:30 PM L. Balch called to determine if Biss and I had met with success. He was informed positively, and advised that the bird, if calling, could be easily located since it called in a two-note distress style similar to a Blue Jay. On the Chicago hot line that evening, listeners were informed that, for some reason, the bird was suspect since it sounded like a Blue Jay. Unfortunately, this message, which totally distorted the original observation and report, circulated through the State, raising many questions. Was the bird actually a Scrub Jay? Was it a hybrid? Had it been raised by Blue Jays? Was it a released or escaped bird?

Although none of these questions can be answered on the basis of a specimen, some of them may be put to rest based on behavioral observations. Plumage characteristics leave little doubt that the observed bird had no hybrid characteristics of any type. It was a Scrub Jay. The two-note distress call, clearly evidenced on the Peterson tapes, is quite similar to other jays, and can not be considered to be, in any manner, unusual. In over 7 hours of observation on Nov. 29 and the following day, the bird was extremely furtive and cautious, and was never seen, in any manner, to associate with the Blue Jays present at the time. The acorn-pine tree behavior was quite normal, the writer having seen such behavior in California many times.

There seems no reason known to this writer, based on any information obtained from the observations of the Scrub Jay in Illinois Beach State Park, to question the verity of the record. Any questions raised, in the absence of further information, would be purely speculative and not based on any known facts.