

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

1. Species Scrub jay (interior race) 2. Number: 1

3. Location Illinois Beach State Park

4. Date: September 29, 1984 5. Time Bird seen: 12:40pm to 12:41pm

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 size bird, slender silhouette, long drooping tail, Chestnut back contrasting with blue wings, head + tail. light underparts. Bird seen in side view only, so throat was not visible, No crest

7. Description of voice, if heard: odd sounding jay calls in vicinity

8. Description of behavior: perched on tip of pine tree with cone in beak.

9. Habitat - general: open pine woods  
specific: beach prairie, pine woods at end of reed swale - water prevented further pursuit of bird

10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:  
No other jay-sized bird has chestnut + blue color combination. Identified as a jay by size and shape.

11. Distance (how measured)? 100ft or less, estimated 12. Optical equipment: 7.5x40 binoculars

13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you):  
clear sky, good light, sun behind the observers

14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: familiar with this species from time spent in the western U.S.A.

15. Other observers: Bob Chapel, George Mozurkewich

16. Did the others agree with your identification? yes

17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Richard Biss

18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:  
Robbins + Jim - Birds of North America: Confirmed observers' initial identification

19. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? 1 hr.

Elizabeth J. Chato  
Signature

Date: October 1, 1984



1984.019

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.