

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL OBSERVATIONS

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Of the several unusual bird sightings in the State each year, few are ever documented fully in print. Most of these sightings do make their way to the State Record Book and American Birds via Tom Imhof, but it would be useful to publish short accounts of these sightings in Alabama Birdlife. Sightings that would be appropriate would include first, second, and third State records; first records for a region (as defined in Imhof's Alabama Birds); first seasonal records for the State; and first occurrences of nesting in Alabama. Naturally, all unusual sightings will have to be accepted by Tom Imhof and/or the State Records Committee before publication. Probably the best way to submit these articles would be as soon as possible after the appearance of the record in the "Central Southern Region" report of American Birds. This will also let you know if the observation is as significant as you suspected (e.g. if it is really a second State record). This will necessitate a delay of 6-9 months in submitting the article.

Frequently people are rather timid about writing an article, particularly if they have little writing experience. To try to remove that fear, below is an outline of how a typical record article could be written. This is certainly not the only way to document a sighting, but you should strive to include, in some order, most of the points in the outline. Articles of this nature are greatly encouraged, for most people are interested in reading about unusual observations, and this will serve to document these records.

- I. Introduction
 1. Species
 2. Date
 3. Number

4. Age
5. Sex
6. City/County
7. Significance of record

II. Specifics of observation

1. Exact location and brief habitat description
2. Time of day
3. Distance to bird
4. Light conditions
5. Length of time observed
6. Optical equipment
7. Description of bird (size, shape, plumage pattern, soft parts coloration)
8. Voice
9. Behavior
10. Proximity of other species
11. Documentation (specimen, photograph, tape recording, etc.)
12. Subsequent observations

III. Identification

1. Primary features of the bird leading to the identification
2. Similar species, and how these were eliminated
3. References consulted, and how these influenced identification
4. Experience of observer(s) with this and similar species

Articles on first nestings in the state would, of course, be weighted toward behavior (courtship, nest building), nest description, eggs, and young.

Again, these accounts are strongly encouraged, for without the proper documentation a record is almost meaningless. The publication of the details of these observations in Alabama Birdlife should prove to be valuable, educational, and interesting.

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