

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD 

Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD  
(Vernacular Name)*Fregata magnificens*  
(Scientific Name)Date(s): Saturday, September 14th, 1985 -- 0845 and 0855 hrsNumber of birds seen: One Sex: Female Plumage: AdultLocality: Near Ken Caryl and Kipling St., Littleton, Colorado Elevation: 8,000 ft.Nearest town: Littleton, Co. County: JeffersonTime(s) observed: 0845 and 0855Duration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): Approx. five minutes each timeOther observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):  
Thomas Clay Bohanon, D.V.M., 8025 S. Santa Fe Dr., Littleton, Co. 80120, (303) 794-6359Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):  
NoneLight conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light):  
Excellent; Bright, sunny w. some scattered high cloud; sun was almost directly behind observer on final close-up observationOptical equipment used (e.g. power, types): Hensoldt-nachtdialyt 8X56 BinocularsDistance, and how measured: First observation approx. 1.5 - 2 miles, last seen almostI directly overhead at height of estimated 400-500 feetIf photographed, type of equipment and film: no camera availableWho else photographed the bird? -no camera available -

Describe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying):

Initially observed circling in vicinity of hot air balloon, north of Deer Creek Canyon Rd. while I was stopped at light at Wadsworth and RT 75 near Chatfield Reservoir, bird was circling and moving north along foothills, lost from sight, resighted again after car-chase circling west of Kipling and northside of Ken Caryl over small pondDescribe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observe in the field:Extremely large overall size, wingspan appeared to be larger than G. Eagle, wings long and narrow, bent like wings of Osprey; Bill large/light-colored and hooked at tip, chest had wide white area, rest of body dark brown to black, upper wing brownish; Tail long and forked with tips like swallowtail---2nd or 3rd primary was missing on right wing, Head was also black.

Description (continued):

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Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

- NONE -

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird:

Flying/circling in air over bodies of water last seen on horizon approx. Bear Creek Lake  
How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

Large size; wing and tail shape, white chest, large size and shape of bill

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

Familiar with this species, observed in numbers over harbor at ST. Thomas, Virgin Islands

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification: Robbins, Peterson, Natl. Geo. -- after positive I.D. due to previous experience with species  
a) at time of observation:

✓ Robbins (Golden) used to show witness after identifying myself and to determine sex  
b) after observation:

Peterson (Eastern) and Natl. Geographic Field guides  
This report was written from reports made during

Date and time report was written: 9 PM, Sept. 17th, 1985, after observation  from memory

Reporting observer: Hans-Joachim Feddern

Signature: Hans-Joachim Feddern

Address: 7415 S.Kendall Blvd., Littleton Co. 80123 Phone 303-972-4607

All reports will be maintained permanently at the address below:

Return to:

CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS  
DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
CITY PARK  
DENVER, CO 80205

AGAINST ALL ODDS:  
FIRST RECORD OF A MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD  
IN COLORADO

Betsy Webb  
Denver Museum of Natural History  
City Park  
Denver, CO 80205

On 16 September 1985, a female Magnificent Frigatebird (*Eregata magnificens*) was stoned to death at Green Mountain Reservoir, Summit County, by a group of anxious windsurfers who had been attacked by the bird. The following eyewitness accounts document the bizarre story of the bird's first sighting in Colorado to its final resting place at the Denver Museum of Natural History.

On 14 September, birdwatcher Hans Fedden was the first observer to report a frigatebird in Colorado. He observed the bird near Chatfield Reservoir and noted that one or more primaries were missing on both wings. A later report came from Marion Met-sopoulos, a resident of Lakewood living between Maple Grove Reservoir and Crown Hill Lake, who saw the bird circle overhead then fly eastward toward the downtown area at mid-day. Again on the same date, E. R. Timken, a resident of Heeney, Colorado, saw the bird in flight over Green Mountain Reservoir near his home through a scope. He recognized it as a frigatebird because of sightings on previous travels to Mexico. One of his neighbors, John Colishaw, saw the bird soaring on a later date and thought, at first glance, that it was a hang-glider. On 16 September, the bird attacked several windsurfers at the reservoir, including Dave Ingram and Jerry Mullikin of Vail. Eyewitness Dean Jones explained that there was about a 7-8 mile per hour on-shore breeze as the frigatebird hovered 20-25 feet over Mullikin and his windsurfer. A friend yelled to Mullikin, unaware of its presence, to look around, at which time the bird began to attack him. Unfortunately for Mullikin, the wind then died down. In

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the calm, he was stranded offshore with the bird diving at him with its feet and bill. He received a gash on one of his hands. When the wind picked up, Mullikin made it to shore with the bird in pursuit. In defense, a group of windsurfers gathered onshore began throwing stones to ward off the attacks. Buzz Burke, a former Army medic currently with the Copper Mountain Ski Patrol, remembers that two stones hit the bird - first on the right side of the body and then on the right side of the head. Apparently stunned, the bird soared over the water ten feet up, then returned from 200 yards out to drop to the ground. At that point, Burke noticed that the right wing was badly broken and had fresh blood around the wound. There appeared to be an older wound with dried blood and pus on the right side of the neck. The group that had gathered decided to dispatch the bird by wringing its neck.

Mullikin, curious about this unusual bird, kept the carcass and identified it with a bird guide. Worried about having been injured by the bird, he contacted the Colorado Division of Wildlife to obtain information on possible diseases. District Wildlife Manager Bill Andree retrieved the carcass, recognized it as a frigatebird, and sent the frozen specimen to the Zoology Department at the Denver Museum of Natural History on 2 October.

Curator of Ornithology Charles Chase and Preparator Mary Kay Waddington conducted a necropsy of the specimen on 4 October. The bird was an adult female (based on the white plumage of the underside of the body) and had bred in the previous season as judged by the presence of an empty, enlarged ovarian follicle. It was in heavy molt and had several primaries missing on both wings, suggesting that the same individual was sighted at both Chatfield and Green Mountain Reservoirs. The skull was ossified, the wing cord measurement was 629 mm, and the total length was 875 mm. The bird had short nails, strongly suggesting that it was a wild bird (captive birds tend to have long nails from disuse). There was a small hematoma on the right side of the brain, a wound (approximately 40 mm in diameter) at the base of the right wing, and a smaller wound (approximately 20 mm in diameter) on the right side of the neck (possibly an old wound or one caused

by the protruding humerus of the broken wing). The bird weighed 1116 grams and had no fat. Average normal body weight for adult female Magnificent Frigatebirds is 1667 grams (Dunning 1984), suggesting that the bird was 30% underweight. There was nothing in the gastrointestinal tract except self-digested fluids, and the gizzard contained 40 parasitic roundworms. These findings indicate that the bird was in a starvation state which may have induced the abnormal behavior of attacking the windsurfers.

The frigatebird's unlikely appearance in Colorado coincided with Hurricane Elena in the Gulf of Mexico. Perhaps blown inland on the heels of the hurricane, the bird may have become injured and disoriented, thus ending up in Colorado over one thousand miles out of its normal range. The specimen (DMNH 39,020) is now housed in the Zoology Department's bird research collection.

#### Literature Cited

Dunning, J. B., Jr. 1984. Body weights of 686 species of North American birds. Western Bird Banding Assoc. Monogr. No. 1.

#### The Mesquite Grackle in Mesa County <sup>1/</sup>

Ron Lambeth  
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Clifton, CO 81520

On the evening of May 1, 1985 a long-tailed, black magpie-sized bird flushed up to a small cottonwood perch in a backwater slough of the Colorado River, south of Clifton, Colorado. Soon the evening light failed and I had to abandon the watch. The apprehension about leaving a "good" bird was quickly extinguished the next morning by the sight of what appeared to be the same bird. This time it was vocalizing and the sounds were like a toy machine gun, cellophane being stretched and crushed, shrieks and "lewd" whistles. The machine gun vocalization came as rapid sets of staccato notes reminiscent of the galloping in the William Tell Overture. Almost all audible sounds were preceded and attended by an erection of body feathers and posturing.

The iridescent blackbird with a large dorsally compressed tail and yellow iris was identified as a male great-tailed grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*). It is Mesa County's first record of this species. The bird was attended by three other dark birds of the same size, but with less developed tails and iridescence. A fifth bird, a resplendent male, appeared in a nearby tree, made no calls or song and was not seen in subsequent days. The other

<sup>1/</sup> Mesquite grackle is the name given to a race of this grackle by Louisiana ornithologist, George Lowry, Jr. (Bent 1958). It is *Q. m. prosopidicola*, the wide-ranging race in Texas. *Q. m. monsoni* is the race (dark females) of New Mexico's Rio Grande River Valley, and *Q. m. nelsoni* is the Sonoran race (smaller, shorttailed, paler females) that may have come up the Colorado River. Since the race(s) in Colorado are undetermined mean that the title of this report is really a speculation.