

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SIGHTING

29-92-4

Species: Whip-poor-will **Dates:** May 21-22, 1992 **Time:** 8:30 p.m.; 2:15-3:00 a.m.

Locality: West side of Little Snake River, three miles North from the crossing of Colo. Highway 318 and the Little Snake River.

Latilong: 1 **Atlas Block # & Name:** 40108F3. Seven-mile Draw

Number: One **Sex:** Male (?) **Distance from bird, how measured:** At first, it seemed to be within 50 feet or so. However, I (Hugh) chased the bird during the second hearing and found that it was much further away than I thought. Perhaps 300-500 feet.

Weather at time of observation: 8:30--Cloudy. 2:15--bright moonlight.

Prior weather & number of days since change: Cloudy the previous two days.

Habitat: Dry hillside with scattered junipers; some undergrowth but not much because sheep had grazed the area fairly extensively.

Behavior: 8:30: called intermittently from two spots. 2:15: called continuously for more than a half hour, but moved to three or four different spots.

Bird's calls or song: "Whip' per will", with an accent on the first syllable and a strong accent on the third syllable. (Check the tape recording.) When the bird was quite far away, I could hear only the third syllable, as a continuous single note, somewhat like the rhythm of a calling Saw-whet Owl.

Comparing the calls to the National Geographic bird song tape, the bird we heard sounds like the eastern form rather than the southwestern form.

Detailed description: First Hearing: The bird sang "Whip-per-will" in short sequences of 5-10 calls. The sequences were separated by pauses of five minutes or so. We heard four or five sequences, all from the same place except the last one.

At first I thought we were hearing a poorwill unusually close, and that the poorwill's introductory note was coming through more clearly than is usual. Dick Pratt, however, identified it as a Whip-poor-will at the second sequence of calls.

Second Hearing: I woke up at 2:15 a.m. to hear it calling again, this time continuously. I dragged out of my sleeping bag, grabbed my dinky little tape recorder, and walked slowly toward the bird. It continued to call without stopping till I came within what I thought was 50 feet of the bird. It stopped and moved further away. I followed to the new site, and tried to record it again and to spotlight it with a flashlight. This time I could not get at all close and decided it was twice as far away as it sounded. It moved around the hillside, and probably covered an area (including the original site) of 3-6 acres.

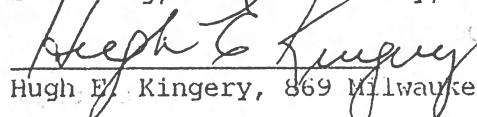
I thought the bird started the continuous song because the moon came out. Bent says they typically sing from dusk to 9 p.m. and start again at 2 a.m. (without the benefit of moonlight). The recordings were probably taken at 100-300 feet.

Field marks not seen: We did not see the bird at all. We did not hear the initial fourth note described by Bent.

Similar species: I also heard Common Poorwills calling at the same time. The Poorwill has a softer, warmer song than the song we heard, which was sharper or harsher. The poorwill's song lacks the explosive and more emphatic three syllables that we heard.

Prior experience: I've heard lots of poorwills; I haven't heard a Whip-poor-will for 35 years. Dick Pratt, who initially identified it, has heard lots of Whip-poor-wills at close range on Cape Cod and in Texas.

Description from notes made immediately after the time of observation, from the recording, and from memory, and from Bent.


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