

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

20 August 1976

Dear Sirs:

I would like to add my enthusiastic support to Paul DeBenedictis' proposal for the establishment of standardized, rigorous procedures for the acceptance of unusual sight records. For a number of years I lived in western New York where a written verification system very similar to that outlined by DeBenedictis has been used successfully for over two decades. Since that time I have lived in several other localities where a variety of other criteria for record acceptance were used. Therefore, I have some basis on which to view the problem objectively.

In most areas where written verification systems are not employed, acceptance of records by the local or regional authorities usually rests on familiarity with the observers involved. This and similar schemes have several serious drawbacks:

- 1) They are highly subjective.
- 2) Even the best observers occasionally make mistakes. Because of differing conditions of observation, each record by a given individual is characterized by a different degree of certainty.
- 3) Good and important records obtained by persons unknown to the local authorities are lost.
- 4) Objective evaluation by workers in the future is precluded. Both the taxonomy of species and criteria for their identification change as we learn more about them. Thus our judgment on the acceptability of a sight record might well change with time if a written description was available for evaluation.

These objections lead me to the conclusion that this system can function only in the most provincial and under-birded areas of the country.

Each of the problems listed above is eliminated by written verification. A permanent record is maintained that becomes equivalent to other forms of scientific data—it is always available for re-analysis. The reasons for acceptance or rejection of the record can be noted by the evaluators so that they are also available to future workers. There is no doubt that such a system with review by an expert committee adds an extra burden of work to the process of accumulating distributional information. However, if judiciously applied to only those records that reflect an important change in a species' status

and submitted on standardized forms, the work load should be acceptable. The Buffalo Ornithological Society has shown that the system is both workable and worthwhile and their experience could be valuable in planning a state-wide system. Finally, if it can work for the entire state, maybe it is not too ambitious to think about regional reporting.

Sincerely yours,
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KPA:dtg

Dear Sirs:

The account by A. J. Lauro (*The Kingbird* 26: 92, 1976) of a Solitary Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) captured by a praying mantis describes what is indeed a rare event. It is worth calling attention to an earlier report by Murray (*Wilson Bull.* 70: 381, 1958) who mentions a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) saved from the grasp of a praying mantis. In that case it was believed that the bird had been hovering in front of the mantis when it was captured. These observations indicate that the mantis may be an opportunistic feeder and perhaps should be called the "preying" mantis. The editors state that "It is unlikely that the mantis would have been able to do more than damage the feathers of the vireo." Perhaps that is true, but in both cases the mantids were apparently unaware of their limitations, and at present, so are we.

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C. J. Ward has called to our attention still another instance of a praying mantis capturing a bird as reported from Dallas Co., Texas in *American Birds* (vol. 28, no. 1, p. 73, Feb., 1974); in this case the bird was a hummingbird of unknown species, which was released unharmed from the mantis' grasp by the observers who discovered it.

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