

**RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION**  
**Records of Vermont Birds**

The following form has been prepared to encourage full documentation, when requested, of rare or unseasonal birds in the state of Vermont. These reports are put into a permanent file and should be as detailed as possible. New reports are reviewed annually by the Vermont Bird Records Committee, which evaluates records for their acceptability to future researchers and for inclusion in the state bird list.

**SPECIES:** Prairie Falcon

**NUMBER OBSERVED:** one

**OBSERVER MAKING REPORT:** Maeve Kim

**OTHER OBSERVERS** Presumably the same bird was seen and photographed in the same location an hour and a half earlier by Brian Machanic. I'm including his notes and one of his pictures in this report.

**LOCATION:** (place, township, county) I saw the bird on Nortontown Road in Addison County, not far from the intersection with Jersey Street South. Brian took his pictures on Jersey Street, only a few hundred yds. from the Nortontown Road intersection.

**DATE:** 12/20/14 – 9:15 (Brian's sighting) and 11:30 (mine)

**TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION:** Brian – approx. 10 minutes – I first saw the falcon fly into a tree, stopped the car, and watched it through binocs for about ten seconds before a Peregrine Falcon appeared and chased the first falcon off. I watched the first bird fly parallel to the road for just a second or two.

**DISTANCES FROM BIRD:** The closest that I was to the falcon was about twenty yards away. The farthest was about 100 yards away and disappearing fast. – Brian reported that he watched and photographed the bird from 60 yds. away,

**WEATHER:** The sky was clear, with little or no wind. The temperature was in the low twenties. I was facing south so the sun must have been above and in front of me, but I don't remember noticing it. (It didn't interfere with my ability to see.)

**OPTICAL EQUIPMENT:** (make, power, etc.) Swift Audubon 8.5 x 44

**OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR**

**FORMS:** In July 2001, I was with a group that watched two adult Prairie Falcons feeding two young on a cliff in Montana. (The birds were discovered by David Sibley, who was leading the trip.) I next saw this species in 2004, in eastern Oregon, and then in Arizona in 2011. A few years ago, I saw what I thought was a Prairie Falcon along Gage Road in Addison County – but the lighting wasn't good and the bird flew before I got close enough for a good look. Because of recent reports, I spent some time studying Prairie Falcons in the Sibley guide and the National Geographic guide.

**OTHER DOCUMENTATION:** Here's a photo taken at about 9:15 by Brian Machanic:



**HABITAT:** Nortontown Road and Jersey Street are bordered by open farmland, with a few rows of trees.

### **BIRD'S BEHAVIOR**

**My sighting:** I first saw a good-sized falcon fly into a tree off Nortontown Road (not far from the intersection with Jersey Street). The bird faced in my direction, showing pale underparts. I had just raised my binoculars when a Peregrine Falcon appeared, chased the first falcon off the tree, and perched there itself. The first bird was about the same size as the Peregrine and generally lighter in color. It had a "mustache" but this was thinner than on the Peregrine. I think there was some dark on the undersides of the wings when it flew, but I got a very fleeting glance.

**From Brian's note to me:** As I went south on Jersey Rd., only a few hundred yds. from the Northtown [sic] intersection, I saw what looked like a falcon atop a utility pole. After pulling over as much as I could, I took a quick look with binoculars and was excited by what looked like a possible Prairie Falcon ! I grabbed my camera that was set to go and ran off about a dozen shots, with the bird in profile , as well as looking directly at me. It was about 60 yds. away, and didn't seem disturbed. . The bird was 18 - 19" tall (far bigger than a kestrel).

**DESCRIPTION:**

**Relative size and shape:** about the same shape as the Peregrine Falcon

**Head:** brown head, dark eyes, dark mustache (mustache wasn't as thick as that on the Peregrine)

**Feet and Bill:** The bill was small and tightly hooked. Right below the bill was very white. I didn't notice the feet or legs.

**Upper back:** I saw the bird's back only for a split second. I have an impression of brown of tan.

**Wings, breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts:** In the tree, the bird was facing me. I could see a pale belly and brownish wings. When the bird flew, I think the middle of the wings was darker brown and both the leading and trailing edges were white – but this was a very fleeting look. All I can be sure of was that the underside of the wing closest to me had both dark and light.

**Tail:** I got only a fleeting impression of the tail, possibly buffy or tan.

**VOCALIZATION:** none

**IMPORTANT: WHAT SIMILAR SPECIES WERE ELIMINATED WHEN MAKING THIS IDENTIFICATION AND HOW WAS THIS BIRD DIFFERENT?**

Because the Peregrine Falcon appeared and took over the same perch, I wondered if the lighter bird might have been another Peregrine, perhaps with some reduction in melanin. However, the facial pattern was quite different. The first falcon had a long, thin dark "tear mark" or mustache, much thinner than the dark mark below the Peregrine's eye.

**COMMENTS:** (was age or sex determined?, etc.) I didn't think about age or sex until I got home. I think there were fine streaks on the breast, suggesting a juvenile.

This report was written from notes taken immediately after the observation.

From field notebook: good-sized falcon! – very light colored in front – looking at me from tree perch – dark eyes – dark skinny-ish mustache – small hooked bill close to head – chased by peregrine - as large as or close in size to the peregrine – some dark on underside of wing when it flew? – all browns and tans

NAME Maeve Kim

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Date of sighting 12/20/14 – Date of report 12/21/14