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Gyr Falcon in Boyd County, Nebraska

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Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) is considered in Nebraska to be a "rare casual winter visitor statewide" (Sharpe et al. 2001). Since 1990, there has been only one NOURC (Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee) accepted record (Class III) for Gyr Falcon in Nebraska (Jorgensen 2003). This bird was a gray morph adult observed below Keystone Dam, Keith Co., 01 January 2001 (Silcock 2001). Nebraska has no April dates for Gyr Falcon, although South Dakota has several April records: 10 Apr 2001, Jones Co., and 23 Apr 1955, Pennington Co., (Tallman et al. 2002). Additionally, an immature Gyr Falcon was photographed 5 April 2010 south of Pierre, South Dakota, (http://www.askthebirds.org/2010_04_01_archive.html).

The following documents the first April date for Gyr Falcon in Nebraska. Documentation of this sighting has been accepted as a Class III record by the 2015 NOURC (Accession # 1708).

At approximately 7:45 am on 03 April 2015 while traveling north on 474 Road (north of Hwy 12) in Boyd County and just north of Keller Reservoir we encountered a large falcon flying just above the ground off to the east of us at around 50 yards distance. The bird flew parallel to the road and even with us for around 10 seconds before disappearing behind some small trees on a hillside fence line, just southeast of the Mount Zion Cemetery. Brogie instantly recognized the bird as a Gyr Falcon and we turned our car around to look for the bird. Not finding it, we again turned around and headed back north. As we approached the fence line, we once again spotted the bird flying just above the ground to the northeast of our location. We sped up and once again had the bird almost even with us when it turned and flew across the road in front of our vehicle at less than 50 yards away, having to gain height to clear the roadside fence. The bird then made an unsuccessful attack on a group of blackbirds near the roadside. During this attempt it turned and flew straight up to a height of 30-40 feet with its underside facing us before leveling off and flying off and disappearing behind a group of trees. This second encounter lasted for around 45 seconds given our speed and the distance the bird traveled. We were not able to relocate the bird after the second sighting and the bird was last seen flying to the northwest, about two miles south of the South Dakota border.

The bird was identified as an immature female gray morph Gyr Falcon based on the following characteristics. The bird was a large (Red-tailed Hawk size) heavily-chested falcon with large swept-back, somewhat rounded wings and a relatively long tail. The bird had very powerful and constant shallow wing beats and the flight of the bird was very direct. As is typical of the hunting style of Gyrfalcons, this bird stayed very close to the ground. The bird had a light brown back and uppertail with slight white mottling. Banding on tail was not clearly observed. The head was

mostly brown and a whitish-colored throat was noted with the first sighting. The bird was aged by the light-colored brownish streaked breast and underwing coloration. The axillaries were a mottled brown, while the remainder of the underwing was very light and almost transparent, indicative of an immature bird. Leg color, cere color, or pronounced mustachial stripes were not noted.

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