



From the Rarities Committee's files

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A report of a Black Stork On previous occasions, this series has featured high-quality rare-bird-record submissions. The reader ought not to form the impression that all of the records received by the BBRC are up to that standard. The description that follows, though fictional, is similar to more than one record considered by the Committee in recent years.



Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*



(Drawn by R. A. Hume)

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

BLACK STORK *Ciconia nigra*

I watched it through 10 × 40 binoculars as it flew high overhead up the river valley. It was a large bird with a long, thick, red bill and pinky-red legs and feet. The head and neck were black and the rest of the underparts were white.

The first thought that would enter the head of a BBRC member upon reading this, even before the realisation that it is a single-observer record of a bird seen once only at long range, is that the notes are very brief. It would then be natural to consider what has not been covered in the description: structure, including neck length, wing shape and leg/foot projection beyond the tail, colour of underwings and undertail, colour of upperparts (understandably absent) and flight, including wing-beats and gliding. The notes undeniably eliminate White Stork *C. ciconia*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Common Crane *Grus grus* and suchlike, yet doubt remains. Sooner or later, too, a Committee member would mention the possibility of Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, which is not satisfactorily ruled out by the description. The record would not be accepted.

Brief views, poor light, bad weather, long viewing distance, a bird's skulking nature or unapproachability, or any combination of these, can detract from a complete description. Nevertheless, it is sensible for an observer to cover in his or her report every visible aspect of a bird's appearance, and it is reasonable for the Rarities Committee to assume that all available details have been included and that nothing further is to be gained from referring back to the observer.

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Michael J. Rogers (Honorary Secretary, British Birds Rarities Committee) has commented as follows: 'This example, of what would generally be regarded as a perfectly obvious and easy-to-identify species, is deliberately chosen to demonstrate not only the intrinsic weaknesses in the description but also how easily an over-liberal approach by the Rarities Committee could lead to an unsound decision.' **ENDS**