

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2013-10-01 21:15:31
Observer's Name	Susan Sullivan
E-mail	ms-mockingbird@hotmail.com
Phone	215-885-0389
Observer's Address	Country: United States
Species (Common Name)	Brown Pelican
Species (Scientific Name)	Pelecanus occidentalis
Number of individuals	1
Observation Date and Time	09-22-2013 6:40 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S15232709
County	Montgomery
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Roslyn
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	2657 Fernwood Avenue 40.129311,-75.140887
Distance to bird	flying about 50 feet above ground from NE to SW (was sitting on patio)
Viewing conditions	extremely clear day; sun setting in SW
Optical equipment used	naked eye
Description	Bird was light brown on body and wings. Size similar to great blue heron. White head with yellow/light orange bill. No apparent neck. No feet trailing behind body. Appeared to be brown pelican, which I see at the Delaware shore on a regular basis.
Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)	Bird would glide for about 100 feet, flap wings two or three times, and resume gliding.
Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)	I initially saw the bird's silhouette flying out of the Northeast toward the Southwest. At first, I thought it was the great blue heron that often flies overhead in the morning and evening, but I noticed there weren't any legs(at all) trailing behind the body and that the neck/head looked unusually wide and was shorter than a heron's. I never suspected a pelican, and thought maybe it was some kind of goose, though there was

no black on the head/neck that would indicate a Canada goose (which are common in our area); I thought maybe another sort of goose or swan, but the neck/bill was too short and stocky and very large in proportion to the rest of the body.

My husband (also an experienced birder) was with me on my patio; I asked him what he thought. He concurred that it was definitely not a Canada goose (no black on head and thick neck/bill), swan, or heron (no legs and neck too stocky) of any kind.

The bird was not a night heron or bittern (we've observed both in flight), or any sort of goose, as the proportion of the bill was about 3/4 the length of the body and the bird seemed to have no neck at all.

The bird was flying at a low altitude (about 50 feet or so) toward the sunset, and became fully illuminated by the sun, which made positive and certain identification possible.

There was no mistaking that it was a brown pelican; the large bill and empty/wrinkled pouch underneath were clearly visible with the setting sun, and no other bird that we know of has this anatomy. The bird was flying slowly enough (as pelicans often do) so that we had about 30 seconds or so to observe in full illumination.

We still couldn't believe our eyes, so before submitting to eBird, I checked Google Images for 'brown pelican' and 'brown pelican juvenile'; all observations from our viewing angle were consistent with those returned by the search engine. We also checked this photo for a confirmation/comparison; the overall shape of the bird (and proportion of bill to body) matches exactly. Also, the bird that we observed had the same style of wing motion/flight that we have observed in Delaware.

I realize that reporting a sighting of this nature puts me into the 'guilty until proven innocent' category, so, although I was already sure about my identification, I also checked Google Images for North American bitterns, night herons, and geese just to quadruple-check (went through my oldie-but-goodie Peterson guide too).

I am currently a college student pursuing certification in middle school mathematics; I fully understand the importance of accurate, actionable scientific data and have taken every step that I can think of to rule out other species. Again, the low flight altitude and sun illumination was a great help.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

I am an experienced birder who regularly observes brown pelicans at the Delaware shore. I also realize the importance of collecting accurate observational data and would never knowingly compromise same.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

I am positive that I saw a brown pelican, as I ruled out all other possible species and am an experienced birder who regularly observes brown pelicans in their 'normal' range.

After

Photo (taken by my son) of brown pelican at Delaware Shore; google images to rule out similar species (see

above)

[Click to edit](#)

PORC-webform00169