

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2016-06-14 19:47:28
Observer's Name	Phil Keener
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Observer's Address	Street Address: 198 Jacobs Street City: East Berlin State / Province: PA Postal / Zip Code: 17316 Country: United States
Names of additional observers	Randy Phillips
Species (Common Name)	Anhinga
Species (Scientific Name)	Anhinga Anhinga
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Myself, I felt when bird turned in soaring posture that there was some indication of lighter areas, consistent with immature or adult female. Randy's's comments as follows - " Possible imm or adult female as I thought I could see constrast between neck and body."
Observation Date and Time	05-09-2016 10:30 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Not yet (please do, eBird is great!)
County	York
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Mt. Wolf in Hellam Twp
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	4091 Furnace Rd at Bridge where it crosses Codorus Creek
GPS coordinates of sighting	Approximately 76Deg 39' 20" x 40Deg 03' 18"
Habitat	Overhead of Codorus Creek with riparian corridor ~ 1/2 mile from Susquehanna River
Distance to bird	My initial estimate was a minimum of 1000 feet above our viewing point and bird was climbing in a soar. Randy's comment -"Approx 1500-2000 feet -bird soaring and gaining altitude."
Viewing conditions	Angle started at about 150 degrees vertical and at times approached nearly straight up. Sky completely overcast, perfect gray backdrop, no cloud break, no sun.
Optical equipment used	Binoculars: Phil's - Zeiss 8 X42 FL, Randy's Swarovski 10 x 42

Description

Bird was initially spotted by submitter while looking at upper corner of a sycamore in search of a vocalizing Yellow-throated Warbler. Distant dark silhouette in background sky picked up and based on "jizz", I told Randy there is a potentially really good bird that he needed to try to get on. My initial impression by shape was a "bow and arrow" configuration with no obvious change in angle from head to neck. The tail end of the bird was exceptionally long, straight and narrow with tail fanned at the end. Again, there was no change in angle from the body thru the tail of the bird. Wings were in soaring posture held straight out. Length of submitter's observation ~ 45-60 seconds. Randy's description as follows, " Bird's body was ~ size of dc cormorant which are common to this area, especially near the river. Birds neck was long and extended. Bill long and pointed. Wings were long and pointed. Very distinct long, wedge shaped tail - notably very narrow where tail met body. I would describe this bird as a flying cross. Bird was all dark, but I thought I could see contrast between the neck and bird a few times during the 20-25 seconds I had the bird in view."

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Submitter picked up bird in soaring mode and it remained in that mode for length of observation except for a very short flapping period (less than 2 seconds) which bird appeared to be doing to gain additional altitude. While in soaring mode, bird made large, relatively slow circles and I felt that they were even larger diameter soars than eagles would typically perform. At the start of the observation, strictly based on "jizz" I was very confident that we were looking at an anhinga. However, once the bird flapped and based on my lack of knowledge of this bird's flight characteristics(I assumed slow, rather ponderous wing flaps with this species) some doubt crept in. When the bird flapped it was reminiscent of some buteos and the larger accipiters trying to gain altitude as far as frequency and appearance. It was certainly quicker than I expected. However, after researching anhinga accounts I found that Cornell's Birds of North America cited a paper noting wing beats of four/second. Additionally, Stoke's refers to the anhinga wing beat as accipiter-like in certain behaviors. These references capture what I saw as far as flapping characteristics. The bird continued to gain altitude and eventually glided out of sight. Randy's account as follows "Soaring perfectly overhead and gaining altitude for approx 15-20 seconds. We both had a nice long look. I never saw the bird flap but Phil did. The bird finally turned north, glided out. Turned toward the Susquehann River and sailed out of sight."

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

There is no possibility of confusion with a raptor and, for me, it came down to cormorants as the only other possibility due to the dark appearance and known challenges in separating these two species. The distinct shape and straight line (arrowlike) from tip of beak to end of fanned tail with no hint of deflection, the wide circle high altitude soaring with only one brief episode of flapping, and eventual confirmation that the wing beat rate I saw is consistent with at least two references sealed the identification for me. Randy's comments, "The long extended neck and soaring flight immediately separated this bird from dc cormorant which I am very familiar with. The long neck and long wedged shape tail eliminated any seabird that we thought could be a possibility. The soaring flight eliminated any duck or loon. Phil and I are both experienced hawkwatchers and eliminated any of the soaring birds (eagle, osprey, hawk) that could be in the area."

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

Submitter notes that the 2011 Spring Reporting period noted four undocumented anhinga observations in the state from May 2-8 with one of them occurring at Brunner Island - York County, ~ 3-4 miles north of this observation. The species is known for occasional vagrancy. Randy's comments, "The shape of this bird along with it's soaring hawklike behavior flight are very unique. Phil and I immediately came to the same conclusion even though we have limited experience with this species. Bird was very high but the gray sky was a perfect backdrop that allowed for excellent views. By coincidence, only the day before I had been reading my most recent edition of PA Birds (Aug-Nov 2015) and came across the photo on page 200 of the Anhinga at John Heinz NWR. The silhouette was very fresh in my mind."

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

Submitter is as positive as he can be on identification, especially after confirming the wing beat witnessed was consistent with two well regarded references. Randy's comment - "This bird has such a unique shape soaring overhead, I believe it would be almost impossible to confuse it with anything else."

During

Sibley's

After

PA Birds, Cornell's Birds of North America, and Stokes Field Guide to Birds

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