









Saturday, September 20, 2008
Magnificent Frigatebird
Militia Hill Hawkwatch
Fort Washington State Park
Montgomery County

The discovery: At 12:58 PM Anita Beaumont spotted a bird approaching from the W-SW and called out something like "What is this bird?" In the first few (5?) seconds my brain ran through the following in rapid succession: 1) large heron – nope, wings too thin and angular 2) large shorebird of some sort [sounds funny now, in retrospect] – no way, nothing that big and those aren't legs trailing behind the body, that's a tail 3) swallow-tailed kite -- [at least now I've got a forked tail], but no, too big, wrong color etc. Luckily, I was saved from further deliberations by Rich Conroy who yelled "frigatebird" and who was quickly seconded by Andy Fayer.

Familiarity with species: None. I've never seen a frigatebird before. That being said, if I should ever see one again, it would be easily identifiable.

Description: Initial impression was of a very large, dark bird with angular, tapered wings and a thin body. The trailing tail was long, forked and scissor-shaped. It appeared to be at least as long as the body (which would explain my original impression of a long-legged wader). The exceedingly long wings were pushed forward at the joint so that the head extended forward about as far as the bend in the wing and appeared to be tucked in the middle. The silhouette was distinctively "frigatebird." Nothing else would have such long wings and tail held in this position.

No color could be seen on the bird. Bill color would have been impossible to distinguish at the height the bird was flying. (Sorry, I'm no good at height estimates. The bird was easily seen with the naked eye, but anything that large could be visible to quite a height.) However, I do believe that if there had been any white on the underside of the bird (chest, belly etc) I should have been able to see it. I saw none. The bird appeared completely dark, including the head. I was unaware that I should have been trying to determine axillary color. In truth, finding no color and no easily observable pattern of shading, I was simply gawking in awe at the huge, gliding machine.

The tail was mainly held closed, though occasionally it shifted and a bit of light peaked through the separated feathers. The bird glided in and rose higher and higher, nearly directly overhead, before sailing off to the E-SE. We watched it for 5-6 minutes until it was out of sight.

Separation from other species: There is no question about the frigatebird silhouette. Perhaps the length of the tail and wings and their proportions are sufficient to determine the species is Magnificent? See the photos taken by George Layne. Likely hurricane origin would lend credence to this ID.

Optics: Nikon Superior E 10 X 42

Books consulted (after the frigatebird had passed): The Sibley Guide to Birds and Harrison's Seabirds

Related information: Joan Silagy at the State Hill Hawk Watch near Reading reported a Magnificent Frigatebird between 10 and 10:45 AM on the same day. She suggested it was following a creek that emptied into the Schuylkill River. Indeed, if the bird had followed the Schuylkill, that would have brought it to Norristown/Conshohocken where it could have turned and headed for Militia Hill (probably with its sights set on the larger Delaware River, a larger lake, and perhaps even the Jersey shore beyond) accounting for its direction of transit and shift in course.

A Magnificent Frigatebird was seen 9/21 and then found dead in NY on 9/22. It is likely that all these birds were displaced by hurricane remnants.

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Record No: ~~075-02-2008~~

075-02-2008

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round Two

Species: Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

Date of Sighting: 20 September 2008 to 20 September 2008

County: MONTGOMERY

Location: MILITIA HILL HAWKWATCH

Observer(s): Anita Beaumont, Andy Fayer, S. Johnson, Rich Conroy

Date of Submission: 2008

Submitted by: Sheryl Johnson, Andy Fayer

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson				X				
B. Coulter				X				
C. Rutt K. Fryburger	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh				X				
TOTALS	4			3				
DECISION				X				

Comments: 4/3 on 2nd Round

Accept as Frigatebird Species

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

9/24/09

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*

Date of Sighting: 20 September 2008 to 20 September 2008

County : MONTGOMERY

Location : MILITIA HILL HAWKWATCH

Observer(s): Anita Beaumont, Andy Fayer, S. Johnson, Rich Conroy

Date of Submission: 2008

Submitted by: Sheryl Johnson, *ANDY FAYER*

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

Specimen: No

Recording: No

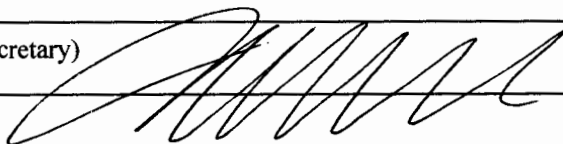
Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
T. Johnson				X				
B. Coulter	X							
C. Rutt						X		
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh				X				
TOTALS	4			2		1		
DECISION								

Comments:

*AG - see 075-01-2008
JH - see 075-01-2008*

4/3. GO TO 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

2/3/09