

Nick: You need this more than I do.

168-01-1999

Bob

8/26/1999

Swallow-tailed Kite sighting, Quarryville, PA

Thursday, August 26, 1999. About 12:35 p.m. while returning from shopping, I glanced at the sky from the parking area at my home (1566 May Post Office Road), about 2 miles east of Quarryville. A Turkey Vulture soared about 500 feet above the yard. Well above it, slightly southeast, another bird soared with horizontal wings with a span, correcting for the difference in altitude, almost as great as the vulture's. Both were seen against a bright cloud background (probably 80% of the sky was cloudy). As the bird slowly circled, I saw with my unaided eyes that the head was white and speculated that it was an adult Bald Eagle. Further observation revealed that the chest and belly were white and that the tail was dark. The trailing edges of the wings were very straight, while the forward edges were curved, coming to a distinct point at the outermost part of the wing.

I ran into the house and got a pair of old, inexpensive binoculars (Nikon 7x35) and focused on the bird. The head was white, the throat, chest, and belly were white. The underside of the wings were white on the anterior half, with the rear half black. The primary tips were also black. The tail was black and was forked, though not as deeply as the adult Swallow-tailed Kites that I have observed in Florida and Costa Rica, and the feathers were nowhere near as long.

I observed the bird for about one minute in total before it soared in leisurely circles to the south and became lost in a low cloud that passed by.

I believe the bird was an immature Swallow-tailed Kite. It had all the field marks that are diagnostic of this species except the very long tail feathers. Nevertheless, the tail was forked substantially. I considered the following species in coming to this conclusion:

a. Bald Eagle: The body would be dark and the underside of the outstretched wings would not have had the distinctive pattern.

b. Osprey: The size and shape did not resemble soaring Ospreys that I have seen. Ospreys do not have wide black trailing edges to their wings with pure white anteriorly when viewed from below.

c. Mississippi Kite: the general shape was that of a kite. In comparison with the Turkey Vulture that was seen simultaneously, I would have expected the Mississippi Kite to appear smaller. Mississippi Kite immatures and females are dark or streaked underneath. Adult males are gray, not white, on the head and body when viewed from below. Furthermore, the underside of the wings are gray, with a light trailing edge, when seen under good conditions. Finally, the tail of this kite is not deeply forked.

d. White-tailed Kite: tails are light and not forked. As with the Mississippi Kite, the size would be smaller than that of the observed bird.

I have seen several hundred Swallow-tailed Kites in Florida (May 1985, May 1996) and a few in Costa Rica (1998). This bird resembled them except for the length of the tail feathers. From the rump forward, the shape of this bird was similar to other kites that I have seen: Swallow-tailed, Mississippi, White-tailed, Hook-billed, Snail, Brahminy, and Grey-headed.

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)

Date of Sighting: 26 August 1999 to 26 August 1999

Location: LANCASTER

County: QUARRYVILLE

Observer(s): Charles Alexander

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Charles Alexander

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

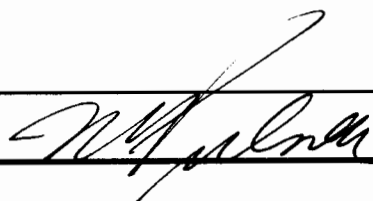
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Recording: No			Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess			X					
R. Ickes			X					
M. Sharp			X					
B. Reid			X					
P. Rodewald			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 3/2/01