







Swallow-tailed Kite

*Elanoides forficatus*

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Tom Ridge Environmental Center, Erie, Pa.

Date: April 21, 2009

Time: 1:10 to 1:15 PM

Weather: Variably cloudy, wind SW to 25 mph, temp. 50 F

Viewing distance: When first sighted about one mile, then when overhead about 300 yards.

Optics: Zeiss 10 X 40 binocular when first spotted, then the rest of the time through a camera lens at about an equivalent power of 10X.

Details: I was at the Presque Isle Hawkwatch conducting a hawk count. Broad-winged Hawks had been moving all morning, but not in any big numbers. At around 11:00 or 11:30 it started to rain, but birds kept flying, so I knew that there must be some clearing farther to the west and perhaps many birds yet to come, so I stayed at the hawkwatch. As soon as the sky began to clear hundreds of Broad-wings began to rise in the west with some kettles containing 200 or more birds. At one point there were well over 400 birds circling overhead. In the west I could see blackening skies and knew that these birds were racing to stay ahead of the next big storm system. At 1:10 PM I was sifting through a kettle of about fifty Broad-winged Hawks just appearing in the west when I spotted a Swallow-tailed Kite circling among them. The identification of this raptor is rather straight forward. The long forked tail spread widely was what caught my immediate attention. The bird was about the size of the accompanying Broad-wings, but the wings were long and narrow, much like a gull, and were bent back at the wrist. The entire underside of the body, undertail coverts, wing linings head and neck were snow white, which contrasted sharply with the jet black tail and flight feathers. The bold black & white pattern, long narrow wings and long forked tail, that it always held open, made it easy to keep track of when it was among the large group of Broad-wings. I had brief looks at the upperside of the kite and could see that the back and most of the wings were gray with a broad black band that crossed over the back and along the fore part of the wings. Within five minutes or so it drifted off to the northeast.

I have seen this species many times in the southeastern United States and watched a good flight of them in Panama in September of 2007. Even though it never was real

close, despite the fact that it was overhead part of the time, I was able to obtain many clearly identifiable photos.

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation – Round One**

Species: Swallow-tailed Kite      Elanoides forficatus

Date of Sighting: 20 April 2007 to 20 April 2009

County : ERIE

Location : TOM RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

Observer(s): Jerry McWilliams

Date of Submission: 2009

Submitted by: Jerry McWilliams

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							
<del>C. Rutt</del> K. FRYBERGER	X							
J. Heller	X							
G. Malosh	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

4/24/09