

Hi Nick,

I wanted to forward this to you for PORC. Sounds like she knows what she saw.

Swallow-tailed Kite
4-30-2012
Marshall Township, Allegheny County
Observer: Grace Smith

Mike

----- Original Message -----

From: [Grace Smith](#)

To: mpfial@verizon.net

Sent: Thursday, May 03, 2012 12:01 PM

Subject: bird sighting

Hello, Mike.

I got your email from Barry at the Wildbirds Unlimited in Monroeville, who says that you are the person to contact regarding unusual bird sightings.

As I explained to him, on Monday morning at 7:30 a.m., I was out in my garden and saw a swallow-tail kite circling above me. I knew at the time that it was an unusual bird of prey, as I had never seen anything like that before, but I didn't know how unusual until I looked it up in Peterson's immediately afterward. I had the good fortune to be able to watch it above my head (just above the cherry trees on the edge of my woods, which is very close to the state game lands in Marshall Twp) for 3-4 minutes - at least 5 circles. At one point it got close to the treetop and a bird in the tree plummeted down in an obvious attempt to avoid the larger bird.

The bird (from underneath) was very white - bright gleaming white, including body and "chin". At one point, I could see him looking around at the ground. The underside of his wings and tail were dark - I would say gray, not black. He made no noise at all. He had a deeply grooved tail, and the name swallowtail fits perfectly. It was really amazing. My father was a lifelong amateur ornithologist and when I went to get his copy of Peterson's (complete with lifelist) there was no check next to this bird, which, I guess is not surprising since I was raised in Connecticut.

I am sure that there will be other sightings, but it really was the most majestic thing, and I am happy I saw it!

I don't know what you do with the information you receive from people, but I thought that it was important to let someone know. I live on Searight Drive in Marshall Twp, which has a Baden address, should you want to look it up on google earth. Please let me know if there is any more information that I can give you.

Grace Smith

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Her reply to me, in case it's useful.

Mike

----- Original Message -----

From: [Grace Smith](#)

To: [Michael Fialkovich](#)

Sent: Thursday, May 03, 2012 8:20 PM

Subject: Re: bird sighting

Mike, thanks for your reply. I have to say that, although I didn't know what the bird was at the time, (I thought at first glance, and at a considerable distance, that it was a blue heron), as I watched it intently I realized that it was a bird of prey. But that tail! As far as I can see, there is nothing else that it could be! The only thing that doesn't fit is that it didn't look strikingly black and white the way the picture does. But I was looking at the underside of the bird which was about 75 feet in the air. I committed it's features to memory - and the white on the underside was exactly the way it looks in the book, with ends of wings and tail a grey.

I was hesitant to email you at all, thinking that you must get so many such emails from people who are either wishful-thinkers, or simply didn't observe things the way they thought they did. If it lends any credibility at all, I majored in biology in college and, as a result, have what I think are highly honed observation skills?! Also, as is the case with all scientists, I place tremendous importance on accurate data collection.

I will keep my eyes open, and also tell my neighbors to do the same. As I said, I am sure that other people will see it also - it is just that unusual. This has been a noteworthy spring for me as far as birds are concerned. A few weeks ago, my next door neighbor came to get me to identify a bird that had hit her window and lay stunned on the ground. It was a male pileated woodpecker! We took him to the

wildlife rehabilitation place in Verona, where he recovered completely from his concussion. They released him Friday. We were thrilled, but will miss him here in our woods...

I will keep you up to date on any future kite sightings!

Grace