

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

8 February 2001

Randy C. Miller
607 Woodland Dr.
Manheim, PA 17545-9553

Dear Randy,

Thank you for submitting documentation for the Swainson's Hawk at Gov. Dick Tower on 14 September 1997, the Mew (Common) Gull at Memorial Lake State Park in January 1998, and the Thayer's Gulls at Memorial Lake in December 1997. After careful review, the committee regrets that it cannot accept these records.

On the hawk, a majority of members felt that the bird was most probably a Swainson's, but several believed that the description was not sufficient to rule out melanistic individuals of other Buteo species.

On the Common Gull, one member voted to approve it, but the other six were reluctant though they thought the bird was likely a Common. Among the latter group's doubts were concerns about the "white spots" on the outer primaries and a "blackish...carpal bar," neither of which would be expected on a first-basic Common Gull.

On the Thayer's, one member voted for acceptance, but the majority who declined listed several troubling features of the description: the pinkish-based black bill (first-winter Thayer's should have an entirely black bill at least through December); no mention of the bird's size relative to other species, and no description of the tertials (fairly solid in Thayer's; mottled in Iceland). These latter members felt that more detail would have been necessary to rule out a dark Iceland or an intergrade Thayer's x Iceland conclusively.

The committee emphasizes that non-acceptance does not mean that the bird was not the species reported, but rather that the committee believes the documentation submitted does not support the identification with certainty. We hope that this will not discourage you from submitting documentation on any rarities you may find in the future.

Finally, the committee apologizes for the unacceptably long delay before all members were able to vote on the record. Circumstances beyond our control caused the problem, and we believe that we are back on a timely track.

186-01-1997

RARE SPECIES REPORT

SPECIES: Swainson's Hawk - Dark Phase ^{imm.?}		NUMBER SEEN: 1
SIGHTING DATE: 14 Sept. 1997		SIGHTING TIME: 1:30 pm
LOCATION:	COUNTY & STATE: Lebanon + Lancaster Co., Penna. DISTANCE & DIRECTION FROM NEAREST TOWN: apx. 2 miles south of Mt. Gretna on Pinch Rd. Seen from the Gov. Dick Tower. DIRECTIONS, IF APPLICABLE:	
HABITAT: Wooded Hills		
SIGHTING CONDITIONS:	LIGHTING: Partly Cloudy, slight backlit DISTANCE: 200 yards - closest observation EQUIP. USED: 10x50 Swifts LENGTH OF SIGHTING: apx. 4-5 min. 65° North Winds 15-20 mph	
DESCRIPTION:	VOICE: not heard SIZE: Red-tailed Hawk size, large buteo. PLUMAGE: All dark, above and below. ANATOMY (bill length, leg color, etc.): No other color but black noted. Small raptor bill. Legs not seen. Wing held in a dihedral while in a thermal. Wings long and almost pointed. Small buteo head. BEHAVIOR: I first saw this bird climbing a thermal apx. a mile away. Because of the dihedral and the rocking motion I thought it was a Turkey Vulture. Then it glided for apx. 1/2 mile. Then climbed another thermal. Then glided south.	
FAMILIARITY WITH THIS & SIMILAR SPECIES: I have seen Swainson's Hawks in Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and in Penna.		
COMPARISON TO SIMILAR SPECIES: I have seen almost all black long-legged hawks. the darkest one that I have seen was all dark under the tail. The wing linings were black, but the primaries and secondaries were dark grey at the base. Then turned blacker toward the tips.		
HAS A PHOTOGRAPH BEEN TAKEN? no IF SO, BY WHO?		
Have any additional observers filled out a rare species report? If so, who?		
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Use back of form for more space):		
SIGHTING & REPORT BY: Randy C. Miller		
ADDRESS: 607 Woodland Dr. Manheim Pa 17545-9553		PHONE # (717) 664-3778
SIGNATURE Randy C. Miller		DATE: 17 Sept. 1997


186-01-1997

On 14 Sept. 1997 I was hawk watching from the Gov. Dick Tower in Lebanon Co. It was 65°F with North winds of 15-20 mph.

I arrived at 1pm. The sky was partly cloudy. Almost right away a Broad-winged Hawk passed by. Then a Am. Kestrel. That was it except for the Turkey Vultures. Apx. 1,000± roost in the area.

Then around 1:30 I spotted what I thought was another Turkey Vulture apx. 1 mile away near the Cornwall Fire Tower. (Lancaster Co.) It was slowly climbing a thermal and rocking back + forth. I could see the dihedral from that distance. I looked around for other raptors for 2 minutes. Then I went back to the "Turkey Vulture". Now this bird was joined by 8 other Turkey Vultures. I could make out the top bird in the thermal was smaller.

Then when the birds were apx. 300-400 ft. above the trees they left the thermal and glided on the south side of the ridge and headed South West. They all came within 200 yards. By that time they were about 100 feet above the trees.

What I saw was a large buteo with long wings that were almost pointed. The wings were held in a dihedral. When it glided past I could see the inner part of the wings in a dihedral and the outer part (hand) almost flat.  I looked to see if the outer primaries were flat, and they were. The tail was long for a buteo. The bird was almost always rocking back and forth. This bird appeared to be all black. I could not see any markings. This bird then climbed another thermal and headed south through Lanc. Co. The bird never flapped its wings.

Then about 10 minutes later a Red-tailed Hawk took the same path. I could see the birds were about the same size but the Red-tailed Hawk wings were almost held flat with the outer primaries flipped up.

Also by 2:30 I had counted 532 Broad-winged Hawks.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

Date of Sighting: 14 September 1997 to 14 September 1997

Location: GOVERNOR DICK TOWER

County: LEBANON

Observer(s): Randy Miller

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Randy Miller

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION YES PHOTO NO SPECIMEN NO RECORDING NO

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. Couchman			X					
T. Floyd								X
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes					X			
J. McWilliams				X				
B. Reid					X			
P. Rodewald				X				
TOTALS			1	2	3			1
DECISION					X			

Comments: 11/5/1

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 9/29/97