

copies sent to PORC
by R. Stringer.
This is just for your
information (MM)

186-02-1999

Swainson's Hawk in Mercer County

On Saturday, November 6, 1999 I was attending the Grove City College foot ball game just west of the campus, adjacent to the town of Grove City. The college proper and the field are separated by Wolfe Creek, which is a corridor for birds in both the spring and fall seasons.

Over the past seven years I have seen Great Egret, Black-Crowned Night Heron, Short-Eared Owl, Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon using this mini-flyway. The creek, itself, is a very nice place to find birds at almost any season.

During the afternoon mentioned above, I took my Bausch and Lomb 8x42 Elite Binoculars to the game. The chance of seeing a migrating raptor is quite good from the vantagepoint of the stands at the football field. The field of view allows one to look north, unhindered, for nearly a half mile and east, nearly a quarter of a mile.

It is not uncommon to see raptors of many species during football games. This game was no exception. Several Red-Tailed Hawks passed overhead and even a few Red Crossbills landed in a pine tree east of the football field, adjacent to Wolfe Creek.

At 3:20 pm I looked north only to find a raptor that piqued my interest. The sky was completely cloud free in this direction and the sun was over my right shoulder, allowing for an unhindered view of the bird against a blue sky. The wind was ten to twenty miles per hour out of the west.

Like many of the earlier Red-Tails that had passed over earlier in the afternoon, this bird was flying almost due south, just west of Wolfe Creek. My total viewing time of the bird was approximately seven minutes. My first impression of the bird, due to its dihedral profile was either a Northern Harrier or Rough-Legged Hawk. I had seen both of these species from this spot in earlier years.

However, this bird was a more compact buteo than the Rough-Legged and fuller-bodied than the Harrier. After two to three minutes it finally flew close enough for me to notice, from above, a light rump with a dark tail that was very finely barred. On occasion it would fan its tail to compensate for the strong, gusting wind.

Still from above, the wings were slimmer than a Red-Tail, giving the bird a longer and leaner look (which is probably why my first impressions were of Northern Harrier). The wings were essentially dark over the primaries and secondaries with a noticeable area of light, scattered spotting on the back and onto the scapulars and coverts. The spotting was diffuse and not necessarily confined to one area. The head appeared to have a light cap in contrast to the darker wings. Particularly around the face, it was apparent that the bird was quite white.

From below, I could see that the tail was lightly barred. The belly was light. The chest was an area of contrast from the belly in that it was heavily spotted up into the chest and running down to the sides, near the upper wing area. The wings were a real standout with a pronounced contrast between the dark coloration of the lower and outer wing with the inner and upper wing.

Distance did not allow for a truly clear viewing of a so-called "dark comma" at the base of the outer primaries. For nearly five minutes I was able to watch it glide and soar with upturned wings, allowing me to jot down the field marks that this identification include.

186-02-1999

My experience with this species includes hawk counts in South Texas during the spring near the Mexican Border. Also, I have identified this species in many of the western states including New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Montana. Several years ago I did discover an immature in central Florida during early October. Two years ago I believe I may have seen an adult not far from this location in early October. Without the benefit of binoculars I could not positively identify the bird.

I believe this species is represented each fall in the east at several hawk watches. Careful hawk watchers usually find a few among the many Broad-wings over the myriad of sites in the east. In some of the mid-western states Swainson's Hawks are now a local nester, particularly in the area of Rockford, Illinois, close to where I used to live in the early to mid 1970's.

Randy C. Stringer

Transcribed from notes taken on November 6, 1999.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

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

Date of Sighting: 6 November 1999 to 6 November 1999

Location: MERCER

County: GROVE CITY

Observer(s): Randy Stringer

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Randy Stringer

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	
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: 3/12/01