

200-02-1994

Gyrfalcon

Falco rusticola

Location: Erie bay front

Date: January 2, 1994

Time: about 11:45 to 11:50 PM

Weather: Cloudy (altostratus) wind northeasterly to less than 10 mph. Visibility good.

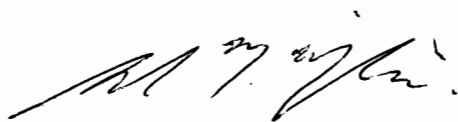
Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Optics: Zeiss 10 X 40 Binocular and Kowa TSN 4 Spotting Scope from 30X to 60X

Viewing distance: approximately 100 yards

Details of sighting and description: Looking south from Fisher Drive on Presque Isle State Park over the bay ice I noticed a dark spot. While studying the spot with some difficulty because of the distance of perhaps 2 miles, I could detect some up and down movement of the head and an occasional flash of white when it turned its head to look in my direction. To my disappointment (since I thought it might be the Gyrfalcon) it turned out to be a very dark immature Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*). This identity was confirmed when it flew. However, about a few hundred yards to the left of the bird I spotted another dark spot on the ice. This dark spot was even further away than the Snowy Owl. It was broad side to me and I could see it bending forward like it was eating something. When it tipped forward I could see a longish tail and primary tips. At this point I presumed it was a raptor. Since it was impossible to identify it at this distance, I decided to drive around to the Erie side of the bay where I knew if it stayed in the same spot it would only be a short distance from shore. I suspected it was the Gyrfalcon that I had seen yesterday. Upon arriving at the area where I thought it might be I could not see it, so I started walking towards the shoreline and suddenly it appeared. It was out of sight of the road because the bank was a few feet above the water and the bird was less than 50 feet from shore. The raptor was immediately identified as a Gyrfalcon. I was a little surprised to see that the bird was chocolate colored instead of medium grey as the bird was yesterday. Since the Gyrfalcon was standing on the ice with its right side facing me, I was able to thoroughly study every detail. The bird was heavy with a small head relative to the bulk of the body. The entire upperside was brown with pale feather edgings. The folded primaries were an unmarked brown and extended perhaps a little over half way down the tail. The tail was a faded light brown with very little barring present on the outer rectrices. The face was pale brown with a vertical bar crossing the face directly below the eye and it had a narrow pale supercillium. The width of the bar was equal to if not slightly wider than the eye. The

forehead was slightly paler than the top of the head. The base of the bill was pale blue as well as the cere. I could not distinguish a pale blue eyering, but could tell that the eyering was definitely not yellow. The underside was creamy colored with heavy brown streaking extending down onto the leg feathering. The feet were pale blue. The bird stayed in a standing position allowing me to take about 10 photos before I ran out of film. It then began stretching its wings over its back and spreading its tail. After about 10 minutes of resting on the ice, the Gyrfalcon decided to leave the sight of its kill (a few remaining feathers of what appeared to be a Rock Dove, *Columba livia*). It flew north over the ice and then quickly turned back to the south and flew over the Bay Front Highway over a high bank and into the city of Erie flying low in between the houses. The two toned underwings (heavily barred wing linings against the relatively unmarked primaries and secondaries) could easily be seen both on the ice when it stretched its wings and when it flew away. Since the Gyrfalcon that was seen yesterday was seen by many people under excellent conditions including Linda and I who independently saw and described the bird as being grey and not brown, I believe this was a different individual.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. T. [unclear]". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Gyrfalcon (Falco rusticolus)**

Date of Sighting: **2 January 1994 to 2 January 1994**

Location: **ERIE BAY FRONT**

County: **ERIE**

Observer(s): **Jerry McWilliams**

Date of Submission: **1994**

Submitted by: **Jerry McWilliams**

Written Description: **YES** Photo: **YES** Specimen: **NO**

Recording: **NONE**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V			Abstain
					A	B	C	
F. Haas	X							
N. Pulcinella	X							
E. Kwater	X							
R. Ickes			X					
G. McWilliams	X							
P. Schwalbe	X							
J. Skinner	X		X					
TOTALS	5		2					
DECISION	X							

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

J. C. Haas

Date:

9-25-94