

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

8 February 2001

Allan Pollard  
1 Anatom Way  
Dillsburg, PA 17019

Dear Allan,

Dan Brauning passed along your report of the Gyrfalcons at Mechanicsburg on 14-15 December 1997, and we thank you for submitting it. After careful review, the committee regrets that it cannot accept these records. Even though we believe that your expertise made this a correct identification, not enough details on the plumage were provided to us for an adequate evaluation of the bird's appearance.

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 conclusively.

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.

Sincerely,

For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chairman

P.S. Beginning this year observers will receive postcards acknowledging that the committee has received their documentation. In addition, whereas observers formerly were notified only when reports were not accepted (in disappointing or irritating letters like this one), they will now receive cards announcing that their records *have* been accepted.

Records #200-03-1997 (14 December 1997); #200-04-1997 (15 December 1997)

**Daniel Brauning, 08:13 PM 1/24/199, No Subject**

Return-Path: <brauning@csrlink.net>  
 Delivered-To: pabirds@redrose.net  
 X-Sender: brauning@mail.csrlink.net  
 Date: Sat, 24 Jan 1998 20:13:30 -0500  
 To: JerryMcW@aol.com, pschwalb@eagle.lhup.edu, pabirds@redrose.net  
 From: Daniel Brauning <brauning@csrlink.net>

*Allen Pollard*

*1 Anselm Way  
 Millsboro PA. 17019*

Frank, Jerry and Paul,

I'm sending you a narrative report of a Gyrfalcon, seen last December, for PORC to review. It's a bit folksy, but I suggested that he simply write up what he saw. The report is by a falconer who was flying his own Gyr at the time. By way of terminology: he uses the term "falcon" to identify a female; it's not a generic term. I'd appreciate a review of this report; note that he is reporting seeing 3 different individual Gyrfalcons.

The file is a dos text file, that should be easily imported. I'll also try to get a copy to Ted Floyd. Please forward this to anyone else on the committee with e-mail. Have a good meeting this weekend!

Dan

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"  
 Content-Disposition: attachment; filename="GYR.TXT"

On December 14th 1997, my son and I were flying our first year gyrfalcon at some pigeons in a large field just outside of Mechanicsburg PA. A cold front had just gone through. It was windy with clouds and a periodic shower. I had let my gyr fly and was ready to train her using pigeons when I noticed a peculiar occurrence.

There was a whitish bird stooping her as she was gaining altitude. Above that bird was a smaller one just like her. Circling yet keeping it's distance. Not a stoop like a falcon's, just shallow fly by back and forth. I did not take much notice to this concluding that it was an aggressive sea gull. I threw out a pigeon and both of the birds chased it. Now the bird had my attention.

My gyr flew right past me with the other bird along side. The wild bird was a silverish grey color with two pencil thin malar strips. It's chest was spotted with darker spots and it's back was barred with dark grey lines. I thought possibly it was falconers bird that had been lost. So I threw out a duck carcass I had and they both raced to it. My gyr made it first and the other one flew slow circles around it. I could see her yellow feet hanging down and her dark eyes as she circled. I couldn't believe how yellow her feet and cere were. The bird that was above the others circled lower but did not come down. This bird had the same color with the same markings, Yet he was smaller. He soared about 200 feet up watching. He had long pointed wings with a thick dihedral and slightly rounded tail. I could not see great detail because of the distance. He never did come closer than 200 feet. The other bird circled for a while. Then joined her mate and circled high and down wind till they were specks in the sky.

The next day with traps in hand I went to see if I could catch one of the wild gyrs. I spent the morning driving through out the valley. I was with a friend of mine. We saw every kind of bird of prey except a gyr. That afternoon I went out by myself again. I went to a farm in the cumberland valley where the starlings come in droves to feed. There are many redtails that sit around waiting for a lame starling. That day I counted 29. I saw two merlins and three coopers sitting around the area. As I rounded the corner I saw a large light colored falcon flying over the field. The starlings were balling up and getting out of there.

I jumped from my truck with trap in hand and ran out into the field. The bird flew out a ways and landed on the ground over a rise. I walked slowly towards it but could not see it as I approached. I was glancing around when a bird caught my eye. It was in a group of immature redtails circling above the farm. It was a warm day for December and the sky was blue. With in the five or six redtails was a large falcon. Distinctly different than the redtails with it's spread primaries and thin wings. It's color was light to white and had no descriptive markings on it's flight feathers. As it circled I was heaving my trap. It ignored me. I never did see the first one that landed on the ground again.

As I was watching the one gyr soar (realizing that I could never catch one on a day like that

**Daniel Brauning, 08:13 PM 1/24/199, No Subject**

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day) I saw a bird from even higher up start to stoop the other one . It came down tremendously fast and buzzed by the falcon. The two of them pitched and dodged each other in playful flight for ten minutes. The they both soared high into the blue sky disappearing never to be seen again.

I was totally charged by the experience. I spent the day driving around looking. Later that day I was with Tom Blizzard. He was in a separate truck following me. I went down one road in the area and he went down another. As I drove along I saw a bird take of from along side the road. It was a large dark falcon. It flew in a straight line away from my and headed up and out. It's wing beat was incredible. Tom caught up with me at an intersection as I was chasing the bird in my truck. I waved for Tom to follow. I followed the line in witch the bird was flying. On the side of the hill was a silo with a ball of pigeons circling above. There was a large dark gyrfalcon stooping over and over at the pigeons. I waved for Tom to pull over. The two of us watched the bird fly from the pigeons to a group of crows gathering in some trees down the road. We had to jump back in our trucks and drive there. The gyr stooped the crows for ten minutes as we watched. She was much darker than the rest. Maybe a little smaller than the other females. The bird bored of the crow game headed south towards Mechanicsburg.

I couldn't believe the day. I started questioning my own experience. To set the truth in stone I had a final experience towards sun down. I was flying my peregrine nest to Hempt Farms out side of Mechanicsburg. She had made a few circles and was gaining altitude when a falcon game in and started circling with her. Not stooping just circling. It was an adult Peregrine. Long very distinctly pointed wings. Clean crisp wing beat. A little smaller than my female. She stayed a while then flew off. Tom and I were tingling. We both agreed that the Peregrine we saw just then proved to us that the other bird we both saw was a gyr. Tom is not as confident as I in raptor identification so the comparison was good for him.

I spent two weeks in search of one of the gyrs I saw those two days. I check feed lots where the starling were. I checked quarries where they may roost at night. I spent hours driving around. But I didn't see any of them again.

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200-01-1999

P. O. Box 482  
1336 Broadway  
Hanover, PA 17331  
19 March 1999

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee  
C/O Frank Haas  
2469 Hammertown Road  
Narvon, PA 17555-9726

Dear PORC:

The following belated report is based upon my own notes, made at the time of the observation.

Species: Gyrfalcon

Date/Time: 16 February 1999. 3:45 PM.

Location: York County. Route 74, southeast of York City, and just southeast of Brogue. Farm field right across from Fairview Elementary School.

Weather: 60 degrees F., clear, wind SW 10 MPH.

Observer: Peter Robinson

Optics: Leica Ultra 12x50 BA binoculars

Observation: I had spent about 30 minutes looking through a flock of several thousand blackbirds, looking for a Yellow-headed Blackbird. While sitting in the car, looking through an open car window at the blackbirds that were on the ground, a rather large raptor flew through the binocular field about 75 yards away from me. It flew over the field, right above and through the blackbirds. It appeared to be carrying something in one foot -- it may have caught a blackbird. The sun was behind me, so the lighting was very good. I followed the bird for about 15 - 20 seconds as it flew across the field, up and over some trees, and disappeared. What I saw was:

- A rather large, heavy-chested raptor.
- Uniform light gray color on the top of the wings and tail. There was no banding on the tail, which I believe eliminates the possibility of Merlin or Peregrine. There was no black on the wing tips, or white on the rump, which I believe eliminates the possibility of a male Harrier.

200 - 01 - 1999

- The underneath of the body was a lighter gray/white color than the top of the wings and back.
- There was some dark streaking visible along the right flank as the bird flew by from left to right.
- There was no noticeable marking on the side of the head. I got a fairly good look at the side of the head, and saw no cheek patch and white eyebrow that a Goshawk would have, and saw no mustache or sideburn marking that a Peregrine or Merlin would have.
- The wing tips appeared to be pointed.
- The bird flew (no sailing) with a strong, deliberate wing beat as it crossed the field and flew up and over the trees.

Comments: I thought "Goshawk" at first, then realized that I'd seen no face patch, had seen pointed wing tips, and had seen some streaking on the flank. "Instant replay" would have been nice, but I did get a decent look at the bird.

Sincerely,

*Peter Robinson*

Peter Robinson

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peterrobins@hotmail.com

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

8 February 2001

Peter Robinson  
P. O. Box 482  
1336 Broadway  
Hanover, PA 17331

Dear Peter,

Thank you for submitting documentation on the Glossy Ibis near Spring Grove on 29 September 1994, the Gyrfalcon at York on 16 February 1999, and the Sedge Wren at Gettysburg on 6 June 1996. After careful review, the committee regrets that it is unable to accept these records.

The ibis was accepted as a *Plegadis* without species designation. A majority of committee members felt that the bird was most likely a Glossy but that the "lack of noticeable white patch at the base of the bill" is not diagnostic from a White-faced Ibis in the autumn.

Two members voted to accept the Gyrfalcon, but the majority had doubts. Most troubling was a belief that a "decent look" at a gray-morph bird would have revealed dark and light gray bands on the tail and at least a suggestion of a moustachial mark on the side of the face.

Two members also voted to accept the wren, but the majority declined feeling that more details were necessary for conclusive identification. One valuable item would have been a description of the song. In addition the bird was described as not having a white eye stripe and undertail coverts, but the description did not indicate what appearance those portions of the plumage *did* have. Like Marsh Wren, a Sedge Wren does have a whitish though less distinct eyebrow, and both species' undertail coverts appear similarly colored depending on the subspecies and the lighting conditions. As a result, the majority felt that Marsh Wren was not eliminated with certainty.

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 conclusively. 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.

# Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

## Voting Tabulation - Round One

Species: Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolis*)

Date of Sighting: 15 December 1997 to 15 December 1997

Location: MECHANICSBURG

County: CUMBERLAND

Observer(s): Allan Pollard

Date of Submission: 1997

Submitted by: Dan Brauning

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								
DECISION				2	4			1

Comments: ~~Silver gray bird~~ Dark bird

2/6/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

8/24/10