

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE  
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

16 February 2003

Mr. Frank A. Bonanno  
130 E. Chestnut St.  
Shamokin PA 17872

Dear Frank,

Thank you for submitting documentation of the Gyrfalcon at Council Cup Overlook on 4 November 2000. After careful review, the Committee has voted not to accept this record.

The committee's vote was three in favor of acceptance and four not in favor. Those who voted against acceptance felt that the possibility of a partially albinistic or leucistic individual of another raptor species was not eliminated beyond a shadow of a doubt.

We would like to emphasize that our non-acceptance does not necessarily mean that the bird was not a Gyrfalcon, but that the Committee felt the documentation did not support the identification with certainty. We hope that our non-acceptance in this case will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities you find.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chair

Record No. 200-01-2000

P.S. I would like to apologize for the delay in announcing our result. We are striving to process the dozens of documentations we receive each year more quickly.

200-01-2000

Species: Gyrfalcon (white phase)

Location: PP&L Council Cup Overlook  
Wapwallopen, PA  
Luzerne County

Observed: Nov 4, 2000 - 1330 EST

Duration of Observation: 2+ Minutes

Observer / Documented by:

Frank A. Bonanno  
130 E. Chestnut St.  
Shamokin PA 17872  
570/648-4081

Other observers: none

Distance: Bird first observed 1-2 miles distant flying toward observer and passing almost directly overhead approximately 150 feet high. Flight direction NE to SW.

Weather: Visibility clear, 60% cloud cover,  
Wind WNW 15-20mph, Temp approx 50 f.

Optics: Eagle Optics Ranger (Celestron),  
10x50 roof prism

Behavior / Description: Bird in flight heading directly toward me slightly higher than eye level about 1-2 miles distant. Sun was behind me so the bird was well illuminated. I was immediately attracted to the bright white head and my first impression was Bald Eagle. The bird then pumped its wings and quickly veered to the left and I noticed the topside of the wings were also solid white. It then banked slightly and its entire upperside was all white from the crown through the back and rump. The bird was still a mile or so out so I couldn't discern any fleckings or markings and that was the last look I got at the upper- parts. At that moment my reaction was Snowy Owl? I held it in my binoculars as it passed overhead just slightly to my left. The wing shape was falcon-like but not quite as pointed, its body was chunky, the tail was closed and broad, and the head was squat. I did not notice any remarkable leg or feet features. All the underside plumage was white except the wingtips that were clearly edged in black. There were no apparent markings about the face, and the underside of the tail showed a faint barring. I was most struck by the translucent primaries and secondaries as the bird passed behind me into the direction of the sun. I was thoroughly perplexed not so much by its falcon-like appearance, but by the white plumage. While the bird's impressions were still fresh in my mind I referenced my Peterson's Field Guide to view the overhead depictions of falcons and the Peregrine and Gyrfalcon were the closest size/ shape match. The overhead views of the Gyrfalcon were of grey and dark phase so the white plumage I observed was still a mystery. Then I turned to the color plates of the Gyrfalcon and there was the white phase! I have no experience with Gyrfalcons and honestly didn't know of the white phase.

200-01-2000

Later on I presented my observation to two experienced birding associates of mine asking them to help me identify the bird based on my description without mentioning the Gyrfalcon possibility. Both colleagues stated immediately that my description fit that of a white phase Gyrfalcon.

I respectfully submit the above documentation for review by PORC.

^^ semper specto ad caelos ^^

Frank A. Bonanno  
Shamokin PA  
([grampy2k@webtv.net](mailto:grampy2k@webtv.net))

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolis*)

Date of Sighting: 4 November 2000 to 4 November 2000

Location: PP&amp;L COUNCIL CUP OVERLOOK

County: LUZERNE

Observer(s): Frank Bonanno

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Frank Bonanno

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

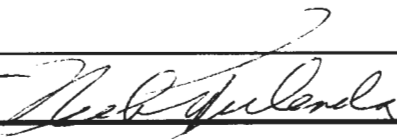
Specimen: No

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			
<del>R. Ickes</del> J. Stanley			X					
B. Reid			X					
<del>R. L. Chervenak</del> P. Rodewald				X				
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS			3	2	2			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 3/4

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 11/19/01