

bird seen
18 Nov 2011

Pennsylvania Rare Bird Report Form

This form is presented as a convenience and guide. It can be used if desired, but is not necessary for submitting a report. Species requiring documentation are those on the Review List or not on the Official List of Birds of Pennsylvania. Fill in all relevant fields and then click on the "Submit by Email" button at the end of the form to send it to the PORC Secretary. Or print the form and mail it to the PORC Secretary (see address below).

NOTE: The fields scroll down as you type to permit as much text as needed. The **RESET** button clears all of the fields if you wish to start over with a blank form.

Species (Common and Scientific Name): Gyrfalcon (dark phase)

Subspecies, if known

Number of individuals Sex(es) 1

Age(s) and Plumage(s) (E.g. Immature; Adult in Breeding Plumage; Year for Gulls; Basic or Alternate If You Prefer Those Terms; State of Molt If Applicable): dark phase adult bird exactly as on page 132 of Sibley guide labelled as dark adult

Date and Time of Observation 8:15 am to 8:17 am

Location (City, Borough, Township) Springfield in Delaware County, PA

Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road) bird over north side of Baltimore Pike over houses and stores at intersection of Baltimore Pike + West Ave. Car pointed towards Media, PA

Observer Reporting:

Name Jim McConnell

Address State Zip 513 Yale Avenue, Swarthmore, PA 19081

E-mail (Optional) jomdsh@aol.com

Phone (Optional) 610 541-0183

Other Observers (Only Those Who Saw and Identified the Bird with You): none

Habitat (E.g. Mowed Field, Woodland Edge, Any other details) over houses, yards, and store parking lots (plenty of pigeons, etc.) nearby

Distance to Bird (Specify feet, yards, etc.) 50 yards or so at closest

Viewing Conditions (sky, weather, position of sun relative to you) perfectly clear day, sun at back for perfect viewing conditions

Optical Equipment Used none, seen from car while at a long stop light while I was in driver seat, yes, true

Description (include as much detail as you observed – size relative to other species present; “jizz”= e.g. posture, body shape, and proportions; colors and patterns of plumage; bill, eye, and leg characteristics; other features relevant to this individual):

Being a birder for ages, I always notice hawks as I travel about, and zero in on them visually by reflex. As I was driving along Baltimore Pike this morning, I noticed an unusual raptor flying in front and to the right at a slight bit of a distance fairly low (about two house heights above the top of the trees, fields, and buildings). It was flying from left to right, but also soaring a bit, such that the wind was bringing it directly closer and closer towards me. It gradually worked its way around quite a few times, such that I saw all angles. My first thought at a distance before seeing it from several angles was Cooper's or Goshawk, but as it came closer I noticed it was very very dark for those birds and the aspect was different generally and in many ways. 'Raven' briefly passed through my mind, but, as it came closer still, I excitedly saw that it was a broad-chested larger falcon with a falcon profile completely, and the characteristic falcon wings with their pointed angled appearance, seen exceptionally well as it banked several times. However, I have seen hundreds (really more like thousands) of Peregrine Falcons and this one was hands down way way different. It was almost solid black in appearance but it had really close bold dark lines of streaking down the undersides with very little light space in between the streaks. Further, the face had no contrasting mustache, and there was none of the light color on the throat, collar, and lower belly and undertail coverts that Peregrine's have in adult and younger stages! Neither were the wings as light as a Peregrine's underneath. The wings had the Gyrfalcon's characteristic two-tone aspect contrasting the underside flight feathers from the rest of the wings. Nevertheless, the wings underneath were still very very dark in all parts with the mottling visible in the non-flight feather parts of the underwings. I cannot stress enough how new and unusual the mottling was in the non-flight feather parts of the underwings, being a dark almost black color with large blotches forming the main composition with only light tiny flecks of tiny spaces showing through. This overall composition of dark blotches with only tiny light flecks showing through was also the feel of the entire upper underside of the bird from wingtip to wingtip, including the chest, but the chest was downward streaks rather than black blotches (these downward streaks, running throat through undertail coverts, formed the entire underside of the bird), although so close were the blotches and streaks that the bird was simply dark. The underside flight feathers were also dark but not blotched so that the whole underside of the wing was dark like the bird. I instantly recognized that the bird was a dark phase Gyrfalcon from the combination of factors. First, the falcon profile and shape which was very obvious all of the time that the bird was close (about a minute), and its chest was much broader than any other falcon (including Peregrine and Merlin) and its tail was even so slightly different seeming than a Peregrine's, being longer a bit and just a bit different either in tip cut or in angle, and by the dark characteristic plumage. The entire bird was one color in aspect, and that was not the color of adult Merlin or Peregrine, the latter of which has some difference in color and color contrasts as well. Immature Peregrines, Merlins, Cooper's, and Goshawks all have extensive light on the undersides and the darker areas of brown are considerable lighter than in my bird. The streaking and blotching of the other hawk species is farther apart and less large in blotch size. In good lighting, those species either appear light or streaked. In my large falcon, the streaks were so large and close together that the appearance was dark generally, and streaked as a second thought. The top of the bird was seen less often but was uniform dark. The color of dark over the entire bird was almost black with a tendency towards brown or gray, and not grayer or browner anywhere. The feet were not noticed. The tail was not the tail of an accipiter at all which is long and generally even width unless banking. This tail had the gradual rump to tip sharpening when flying from the side as falcons do but was spread out in a bit more chunky

See Cont'd

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

The bird flapped only occasionally, and it went forward and then circled slightly several times then repeating this. It flapped a few times at single moments but not together at first, then later a few times together (when I briefly thought Raven). At its closest point it left a circle in the air and banked beautifully (showing me its entire underside including wings and tail fabulously). It had banked nicely a couple times earlier as well. After its closest bank, it flapped its last seen flaps, three times flapping, but, like the earlier flaps, they were remarkable flaps. They were heavier and slower than a Peregrine or Merlin, but still somewhat stiff-winged and pointy as with falcons. It just seemed like a little bit bigger flap than the other two falcons. Also there was a longer pause between them than with other falcons. The flaps seemed more deliberate and had purpose, but not as quick nor frenetic as other falcons, like Peregrine and Merlin.

The description (continued)

were not noticed. The tail was not the tail of an accipiter at all which is long and generally even

→ width unless banking. This tail had the gradual rump to tip sharpening when flying from the side as falcons do but was spread out in a bit more chunky manner than accipiters when

soaring/banking. The tail was a bit longer than a Peregrine's, as stated, and looked just like the

one in the soaring dark adult on page 132 in Sibley's guide. The tail was dark above and below

with perhaps a bit of a mottled aspect. The entire bird was absolutely identical to the dark adult

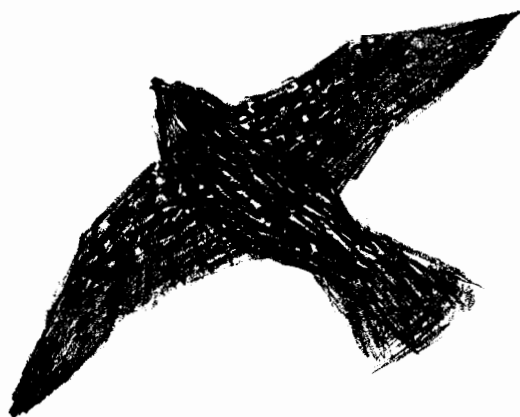
shown soaring in the Sibley guide. The broadness of the chest was remarkable and combined

with the broadness of the wings (which still tapered to pointed tips) it created a wildly broad-

chested falcon feel. The throat was darker than in any Peregrine and it did not stand out.

However, there was a bit of lightness to it that gave some face feel. The face and head were

completely dark with no light collar or throat to contrast greatly.



Something like this,
I'm not an
artist,
very dark
big falcon

Sun
behind me, not in back of bird

Vocalizations

none

Supporting evidence if any: (Check all that apply)

Photograph

Video Recording

Audio Recording

Drawing

Photographer/recorder/illustrator:

Name

Jim McConnell

Address

513 Yale Ave

City State Zip

Swarthmore, PA 19081

E-mail (Optional)

jomdsh@aol.com

Phone (Optional)

610 541-0183

Please send a copy of the photograph, drawing, or recording to:

Nick Pulcinella, Secretary
Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee
613 Howard Ave.
West Chester, Pa 19380
Nickpulcinella@verizon.net

If this is a dead bird:

General Condition

If collected (by permit), location of specimen if known

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

Previous experience with this and/or similar species

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

References Consulted:

During Observation

After Observation

Sibley Guide, internet

Date of this Report:

18 Nov 2011

(Click on the box and select date from calendar)

Reset Form

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Gyrfalcon Falco rusticolis

Date of Sighting: 18 November 2011 to 18 November 2011

County : DELAWARE

Location : SPRINGFIELD

Observer(s): Jim McConnell

Date of Submission: 2011

Submitted by: Jim McConnell

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. DeReamus			X					
A. Guarente			X					
T. Johnson				X				
B. Coulter				X				
R. Koury					X			
D. Weber				X				
G. Malosh			X					
TOTALS			3	3	1			
DECISION								

Comments: 3/4 IV-A

Signature (Secretary) Nick Pulcinella

Date: