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American Cystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus)

in Carbon County:

First Pennsylvania record since 1891

by Rick Wiltraut

On April 2, 1993 I was birding in the rain at Beltzville Lake, Carbon County, Pennsylvania. There was a large fallout of waterbirds on the lake including a very noisy flock of 92 Oldsquaws (Clangula hyemalis). While listening to the constant vocalizations of the Oldsquaws, I was distracted by a loud, clear "wheep" call coming from in the direction of the beach. As I scanned the beach through my binoculars, I was astonished to see an American Cystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus) standing there. Realizing the rarity of the bird I ran to my car, arriving at the beach in less than a minute. The bird was associating with a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) and I was able to study it well at a distance of approximately 100-150 feet through a 32 power Bushnell spotting scope. All field marks were clearly seen including its large size, long and heavy orange-red bill, yellow eyes, pale pink legs, white belly, and black head contrasting with a brown back, ruling out the similar European Cystercatcher (Haematopus ostralegus). I was able to obtain about a dozen recognizable photographs through a Vivatar 400 mm lens.

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American Oystercatchers are strictly coastal, breeding most abundantly from New Jersey south. Since the early 1960's, it has increased as a breeding bird along the East Coast and has expanded its breeding range northward. It now regularly breeds as far north as Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Its increase has been mostly attributed to its abandonment of beaches and converting to sand bars in saltmarshes for nesting. In New Jersey, 158 adults found in 1976 increased to 262 in 1979 (Cutler, Boyle, Paxton, Richards, 1979; 1985).

Not surprisingly, the American Oystercatcher at Beltzville Lake occurred after and during steady northeasterly winds. Winds on April 1st averaged 14 mph from the northeast with a maximum sustained wind of 18 mph. On the 2nd, the day of the sighting, winds averaged 7 mph from the northeast with a maximum sustained wind of 15 mph.

This is apparently the first documented record of an American Oystercatcher in Pennsylvania since one was collected on Chester Island in the Delaware River on May 14, 1891 (Poole, 1964).

Literature cited.

Cutler, D.A., Boyle, W.J., Paxton, R.O., Richards, K.C. 1979; 1985. American Birds. Hudson-Delaware Region. Vol. 33 No. 6 p. 849; Vol. 39 No. 5 p. 892.

Poole, E.L. 1964. Pennsylvania Birds. Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. p. 29.

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References.

Bruun, B. 1970. Birds of Britain and Europe. Larousse and Co. Inc. pp. 112-113.

Peterson, R. T. 1980. A Field Guide to the Birds: East of the Rockies. Houghton Mifflin Company. pp. 116-117.

Peterson, R. T., Mountfort, G., Hollom, P.A.D. 1967. A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe. Houghton Mifflin Co. pp. 101, 118.

Whiting, S.B., Pesch, B.P. 1983. Vineyard Birds. Concord Press. p. 31.

Farrand, J.Jr., Editor. 1983. Master Guide to Birding. Wilds, C. (Shorebirds) pp. 332-333. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus)**

Date of Sighting: **2 April 1993**

Location: **BELTZVILLE STATE PARK**

County: **CARBON**

Observer(s): **Rick Wiltraut**

Date of Submission: **1993**

Submitted by: **Rick Wiltraut**

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							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

*J. C. Haas*

Date:

*2-23-94*