

266-02-2003

Rare Bird Documentation for PORC:

Species: American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)

Number: 1

Sex, age, plumage: Adult

Date/time of observation:

Friday, 19 September, 2003, 16:35 and 17:15

Location:

The bird was seen over Lake Nockamixon from the pier at the marina in Nockamixon State Park, upper Bucks County, PA.

Observer(s):

Bill Etter

1030 Old Bethlehem Road #2

Perkasie, PA 18944

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215-258-0229

Eleanor Harding and Dave Birchler also observed the bird. Further reports pending.

Habitat: The bird was seen flying low over Lake Nockamixon from well above the marina to well below the fishing pier, a distance of over 1.5 miles.

Conditions: Viewing conditions on Friday, 19 Sept were excellent: a bright early autumn day. The oystercatcher approached from the northeast and flew southwest. Sun was at our backs as the bird approached, and was high enough in the sky as to not present a problem as it flew southwest.

Distance / Optics:

I initially spotted the bird in its approach from a distance of approximately one half mile. I was using 8x24 power binoculars. I quickly switched to 20x spotting scope and watched as it passed within 50 yards of our observation point. It was continuously observed by all present as it flew approximately 1 to 1.5 mile to the southwest. The bird was low over the water the entire time and nothing obstructed the view. We were watching from the end of a treeless pier that juts out into the middle of the lake.

Description:

From a half-mile or more, I saw the bird approaching, naked eye. It was flying directly over the water's surface, like a cormorant might be expected to do, but the coloration was wrong. The bird looked strange, obviously, so I used the binoculars and could immediately see that it was a stocky, black-headed bird with a white breast and belly. My scope was right there, and it took about 3 seconds to get the bird in focus. I immediately saw the long, bright, deep-orange bill, as well as the brown back and white

stripe through the wing. The others had no problem picking it up on its approach, and we had a great view of all field-marks as it flew past us, from the mostly white under wing, to the terminal tail band, right down to the yellowish eye.

Identification: American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*). Adult bird.

Behavior: The oystercatcher flew down the center of the lake. It was a foot or less from the water's surface nearly the entire time. It's wing beats were constant and fast. When it was about a mile and a half from us, it appeared to lift a bit, then land in the water. Once on the surface (if, in fact, it actually was on the surface – it was quite distant at this point), the bird was lost from view. I briefly found the bird again at about 17:15. I had driven around to a good vantage point on the opposite side of the lake (Three Mile Run boat ramp) in an attempt to relocate the bird. As I was asking a fisherman if he'd seen any strange birds, I heard a high pitched double call note, looked up, and observed the oystercatcher flying back up the lake. It was at a slightly higher altitude this time, and made it as high as the treetops before veering west and out of view, around a corner and down a branch of the lake below the mouth of the Tohickon Creek. That was the last time the bird was seen, despite considerable effort.

Vocalizations: As described above, one flight call was heard: a clear, high-pitched double call note (similar to *weep-weep* or *weet-weet*).

Supporting evidence: None.

Separation from similar species: The species is fairly unique and hard to misidentify. Black Oystercatcher is eliminated due to extensive white on the bird's undersides and in the wing.

Other relative details: This bird was seen following the passage of Hurricane Isabel. The eye of the storm had passed through the western portion of the state on the previous night.

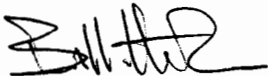
Previous experience: I've seen plenty of them in more appropriate habitat. It's one of my favorite birds, and I'm thrilled to have seen one so close to home!

Certainty of identification: I am 100% confident in my identification of this bird!

References consulted: I looked at The Sibley Guide to Birds as a refresher on differences between adult and juvenile American Oystercatchers.

Date of report: 21 Sep, 2003.

Signature of observer:



BILL ETTER,
PERKASIE, PA

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)

Date of Sighting: 19 September 2003 to 19 September 2003

Location: LAKE NOCKAMIXON

County : BUCKS

Observer(s): bill Etter, Eleanor Harding, Dave Birchler

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Bill Etter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

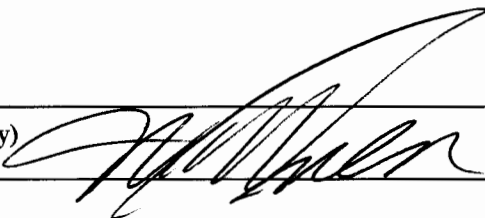
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
G. Armistead R. Witmer			X					
D. Heathcote			X					
P. Guris			X					
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X X					
R. Leberman			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			7					
DECISION			X					

Comments: 7/10

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

9/16/04