

BLACK SKIMMER, Northampton County

December 9, 2005

Arlene Koch

At approximately 10:30 Friday morning, December 9, 2005, an adult black skimmer flew through the valley where I live in eastern PA, 2 miles west of the Delaware River and the Jersey border. The skies had just cleared from an unusual early December snowstorm (6.5 inches) and the sun had come out. Gulls were passing overhead so I took my binoculars with me when I went out to clean off the vehicles. The light was great; even the gulls looked incredible from the reflected sunlight off the snow. The gulls were high but not out of sight and I could readily distinguish between ring-billed's and herrings without aid of optics. Then, while taking a break from shoveling, I saw a lone bird much lower and on the other side of the fields. It was flying straight east to west, it had long, thin pointed wings that were all dark on the uppersides, light (almost white) undersides, a short light tail, and an incredibly big downward sloping bill that looked yellow or orangish. It looked for all the world to be a black skimmer but my mind immediately said, "black skimmer?" Nah, I thought, it can't be. So I grabbed my binoculars that were on a nearby rock and looked. The bill was indeed orangish at its base but dark at the tips. Its head was dark but its face was white. I had a clear, unmistakable view through 10.5 X 43 Brunton Epoch binoculars. It was a black skimmer.

The only other species this bird could have mistaken for was one of the terns, most probably a Caspian tern. But a Caspian tern doesn't have wings that are all dark on top nor does it have dark extending down the tail. This I only saw when I looked through the binoculars. And while a Caspian tern's bill is orange, it's not nearly as long, down pointed, dark at the ends, or big and bulky as is the bill of a black skimmer. Black skimmers are unmistakable in their shape, flight style, bill, etc.

Were I to say anything more than this I'd only be padding the report. This bird was almost certainly chased inland by the aberrant snowstorm along the coast. At the time eastern New Jersey was still getting hit hard and I can see the Jersey hills across the Delaware River in the distance from my property.

Arlene Koch
1375 Raubsville Road, Easton, PA 18042
610 253-6377 davilene@aol.com

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Black Skimmer (Rynchops niger)

Date of Sighting: 9 December 2005 to 9 December 2005

Location: WILLIAMS TOWNSHIP

County : NORTHAMPTON

Observer(s): Arlene Koch

Date of Submission: 2005

Submitted by: Arlene Koch

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

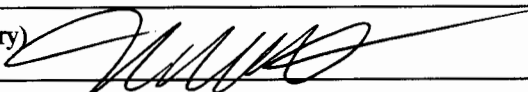
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut								
A. Guarente			X					
P. Guris			X					
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
J. Heller			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			6					
DECISION			X					

Comments: C/O

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

7/24/02