

504-01-2002
DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

This form submitted to the **Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee** as supporting documentation of an unusual species.

1. Species:

Lewis's Woodpecker, *Melanerpes lewis*

2. Number of birds:

One individual

Age/sex/plumage:

sex and age not determined

3. Date(s):

October 20, 2002

4. Location (include county):

Allegheny Front/Central City Hawk Watch in Bedford County, just east of the border from Somerset County.

5. Observers:

George Bercik, Gene Flament, Nancy Flament, Janet Kuehl, Tom Kuehl, Rosemary McGlynn, Evelyn Merriman, Che Mincone, Marion Mincone, Jeff Payne, Jim Rocco, Linda Sporrer, Tom Sporrer, Kate St. John, Chuck Tague and Joan Tague.

All these observers are active and experienced hawk watchers at the Allegheny Front site. The Flaments, the Kuehls, McGlynn, the Mincones, Payne, Rocco and the Tagues are counters/site coordinators. All but the Kuehls have at least five years experience as site coordinators. Bercik, Merriman, L. Sporrer and St. John are regular spotters and observers.

5b. Documentor:

Chuck Tague

Mailing Address:

Nature Observer News
432 Olympia Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15211
(412)488-8760
bluejay@city-net.com

Others agreeing with identification:

All present

Observers NOT agreeing with identification:

none

6. Description of bird (size, shape, proportions, details of both color and patterns on head, back, chin, throat, breast, flanks, undertail, wings, and tail, etc.; coloration of soft parts: bill, eye, legs and feet) include only details actually seen in the field:

From the narrative I wrote on October 20, 2002

I spotted a dark bird flying over the northern tree line. My first impression was a crow because of the uniform dark color and bulky body. However its primaries were more flexible than a crow's and appeared to whip with each flap. The wings had a spread finger appearance. It passed over the site about 30 feet above the tree line. Its shape was that of a woodpecker but the lack of white on its wings quickly eliminated the common Pennsylvania species. Its smooth, not undulating flight again excluded all the likely woodpeckers except Pileated but this bird was closer in size to a flicker.

As the bird approached I noticed a green iridescent sheen to its upper body. From below its head was round, beak thick at the base. There was a distinct notch to its tail. The clinching feature was the "ooh"s and "aah"s from the observers as the bird's flanks became apparent. They, and I, noted the flanks were crimson.

7. Description of behavior:

The bird was flying from north to south about 30 feet above the tree line on the ridge of the Allegheny Front. It passed nearly over my head, slightly to the west. The bird disappeared due south, following the escarpment of the Allegheny Front. It flapped consistently, never gliding or soaring. The bird's flight rhythm reminded me of a crow's but its primaries were more flexible than a crow's and appeared to whip with each flap. Its flight was steady and unlike the typical undulated flight of medium-sized woodpeckers.

8. Description of vocalizations:

None

9. Description of immediate and surrounding habitat(s):

The ridge of the Allegheny Front is dry Oak/Hickory forest. The tree composition around the site is Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*), Chestnut Oak (*Q. montana*), Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), Black Oak (*Q. velutina*), Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*) and Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*). The shrub and understory species are Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Scrub Oak (*Q. ilicifolia*), Blueberries (*Vaccinium spp.*) and Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*).

According to Winkler, Christie and Nurney (*Woodpeckers an Identification Guide to Woodpeckers of the World*. Houghton Mifflin 1995) Lewis's Woodpecker has a "marked change in diet in the winter and must move lesser or greater distances to wintering areas which provide acorns or nuts."

From Winkler: "In winter food supply is the most important aspect of habitat selection, and oak woodlands and commercial orchards (almond, walnut, pecan) are common winter settings; local supply of corn may also be important."

Although the forest along the Allegheny Front, both at and north of the hawk watch site, would appear to have adequate food for a Lewis's Woodpecker, the mast this year is meager.

Also from Winkler: "winter altitudinal range spans from sea level to 200 m." The 2,700 feet elevation at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, although high by Pennsylvania standards, is well within the range of Lewis's Woodpecker.

10. Viewing conditions:

The trajectory and height of the bird in relation to the mid morning autumn sun provided ideal viewing conditions for me and the other observers.

Optical equipment used for observation (type, power):

I observed the bird with Swarovski EL 8.5 X 42 binoculars, less than six months old; cleaned and adjusted for the day at the watch.

Distance/ how measured?

I first spotted the bird at about 150 yards, the distance it became visible over the tree line at the northern edge of the hawk watch clearing. It passed within 70/90 feet of the observers, based on a tree height of about 60 feet.

The bird was observed from:

I spotted the bird while standing on the standard picnic table located along the southern perimeter of the watch site.

Time(s) of observation:

9:10 EST

Total time of observation:

3 to 8 seconds

Weather (including regional or national weather patterns if relevant):

From the Hawk Migration Association of North America Eastern Hawk Report form that I filled out as site coordinator.

At 09:00 a light wind was blowing from the southwest. The temperature was 7°C and cloud cover was 30%. The clouds were high and to the west of the site.

Sky conditions/ relative position of the sun:

The report form lists sky condition and visibility as clear. At the Allegheny Front that means we had visibility up to 25 miles to the east.

The bird passed slightly to the west of me. It was more to the west of the all the other observers except Jeff Payne. With a clear sky and a mid-morning October sun shining over the shoulders of the observers viewing conditions could not have been more ideal.

11. Previous experience with this species and similar species:

I have never seen a Lewis's Woodpecker before. However, I have made three trips to California and one each to Arizona and Colorado. I prepared for each trip and I am familiar with the woodpeckers of the western United States. Although I could not recall its name I recognized the bird immediately.

12. Please eliminate other similar species and/or hybrids (use additional paper, if necessary):

The lack of white on its wings, tail and flanks eliminated all the woodpeckers that reside on or migrate along the Allegheny Front. This character also ruled out the other eastern woodpeckers and possible migrants from the west.

Jeff Payne and I considered alternatives other than woodpeckers. The "spread-finger" appearance of the primaries and "whip-like" wing beat ruled out a fancy Rock Dove or any other Columbiform. The bulk of the body and color pattern also eliminated a large flycatcher such as Scissor-tailed or Fork-tailed Flycatcher.

I served as Education Curator of the Pittsburgh Aviary for seven years and I am not familiar with any potential escaped cage or aviary bird that could be mistaken for this bird. Nor am I familiar with any institution that keeps Lewis's Woodpeckers.

13. Where photos obtained?

Although I had my camera and 300 mm lens around my neck there was insufficient time for a photograph.

14. Books & illustrations consulted, and advice received

At the site, after first writing notes, we consulted the field guides we had available: Sibley, National Geographic 3rd edition, Kenn Kaufman and the Golden Guide.

All confirmed our initial conclusion and not one of any of the observers' notes contradicted the descriptions and illustrations in the guides.

From Sibley we learned that Lewis's Woodpecker is a rare vagrant to the east of its normal migration route with a sighting near the Maryland/Virginia border just south of the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch.

At home I consulted Winkler, Christie and Nurney. *Woodpeckers an Identification Guide to Woodpeckers of the World*. Houghton Mifflin 1995) and Bent, Arthur Cleveland. *Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers*. Dover, 1964.

How did these influence this description?

Not at all. I based this description on field notes I wrote before consulting any of the guides.

15. How long after the observation were field notes recorded?

I took time to write my notes immediately after the bird passed and I suggested the other observers do the same.

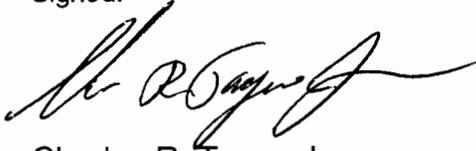
16. How long after observation was this form completed?

I wrote the narrative form as soon as I got to my computer that evening, around 20:15. I completed this form ten days after.

17. Additional remarks:

None

Signed:



Charles R. Tague Jr.

Date:

October 31, 2002

The documentation form is adapted from the form used by:

IORC Secretary c/o Avian Ecology Program,
Natural Heritage Division/Dept. of Natural Resources, Springfield, IL
62701

REVISED AUGUST 1998

DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

This form submitted to the **Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee** as supporting documentation of an unusual species.

504-01-2002

1. Species:

Lewis's Woodpecker, *Melanerpes lewis*

2. Number of birds:

One bird

Age/sex/plumage:

Undetermined

3. Date(s):

October 20, 2002

4. Location (include county)

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch in Bedford County, near the border of Somerset County

5. Observers:

George Bercik, Gene Flament, Nancy Flament, Janet Kuehl, Tom Kuehl, Rosemary McGlynn, Evelyn Merriman, Che Mincone, Marion Mincone, Jeff Payne, Jim Rocco, Linda Sporrer, Kate St. John, Chuck Tague and Joan Tague.

5b. Documentor:

Linda Sporrer

Mailing Address:

1110 Greenlawn Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15220
412-341-5924
ljbirder@cs.com

Others agreeing with identification:

All present (see above listing)

Observers NOT agreeing with identification:

None

6. Description of bird (size, shape, proportions, details of both color and patterns on head, back, chin, throat, breast, flanks, undertail, wings, and tail, etc.; coloration of soft parts: bill, eye, legs and feet) include only details actually seen in the field:

The bird was a medium/large, dark woodpecker first sighted flying from the treeline to the north of the hawk watch site and proceeding to fly south almost directly overhead, approximately 20 ft above the treeline (perhaps 60-80 feet overhead). The first thing that I noticed as the bird approached was that it had large/broad, plain, dark wings. As it approached nearer, a dark bottle green iridescence became apparent on the tops of the wings and back (on the down stroke). When directly overhead two more interesting characters became obvious – 1. A beautiful rose-red breast, belly and flanks and 2. a very distinct forked/notched tail. In fact, the tail even briefly appeared almost barn-swallow-like, then reverted to an obvious notch.

7. Description of behavior:

The bird flew steadily and in a straight line (no gliding) from north to south passing almost directly overhead before disappearing from sight.

8. Description of vocalizations:

None

9. Description of immediate and surrounding habitat(s):

Allegheny Front Hawk Watch site – along a ridge near the Bedford/Somerset county line. Mostly deciduous woods on the ridge overlooking pastoral/pine habitats in the valley below.

10. Viewing conditions:

Clear, mid-morning sunlight provided perfect lighting in which to view the bird. There were no visual obstructions as it approached and passed overhead.

Optical equipment used for observation (type, power)

Nikon Action Egret 8 x 40 binoculars; clean and in good working order.

Distance/ how measured?

The bird was first sighted as it approached from a distance of approximately 150 yards as it cleared the treeline at the north end of the hawk watch site. It passed overhead at approximately 60-80 feet based on surrounding tree height.

The bird was observed from:

Near the southern edge of the hawk watch site; first from a sitting position as the bird was first sighted and then standing as it passed overhead and out of sight.

Time(s) of observation:

9:10 AM EST

Total time of observation:

Approximately 5-10 seconds.

Weather (including regional or national weather patterns if relevant):

From the report of the site coordinator:

Light wind from the southwest. Temperature 7 degrees C, with 30% cloud cover high and to the west of the site.

Skyconditions/ relative position of the sun :

Visibility was clear; sun was shining from the east over my shoulder providing perfect viewing conditions.

11. Previous experience with this species and similar species:

I have never previously seen this species. However, I am very familiar with all woodpecker species common to the area, and I have spent much time studying various field guides, especially Sibley's field guide. Recognition of this species as something not normally seen in this area was immediate, followed quickly by species identification before the bird passed out of sight.

12. Please eliminate other similar species and/or hybrids (use additional paper, if necessary):

There was absolutely no white on this bird's wings or tail, immediately eliminating all woodpeckers commonly seen in Pennsylvania.

13. Where photos obtained?

Unfortunately no; the bird passed quickly by while still being admired with binoculars only.

14. Books & illustrations consulted, and advice received

At the viewing site, the site coordinator advised all observers to immediately record their observations before we consulted the field guides present. After recording my observations, I consulted Kenn Kaufman's field guide and Sibley's field guide.

How did these influence this description?

This description was taken directly from my original notes which were taken prior to consulting any other source.

15. How long after the observation were field notes recorded?

Immediately after the bird passed out of sight at the instruction of the hawk watch site coordinator, Chuck Tague.

16. How long after observation was this form completed?

I completed this form on November 20 using the notes taken on October 20, 2002.

17. Additional remarks:

None, other than it was an unexpected thrill and a privilege to be at the right place at the right time to be able to view this bird so well. The only thing that could have made the sighting better would have been if the bird had perched in a nearby tree and posed for pictures.

Signed:



Linda J. Sporrer

Date:

November 20, 2002

The documentation form is adapted from the form used by:

IORC Secretary c/o Avian Ecology Program,
Natural Heritage Division/Dept. of Natural Resources, Springfield, IL 62701
REVISED AUGUST 1998

504-01-2002

DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

This form submitted to the **Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**
as supporting documentation of an unusual species.

This reported is being submitted in support of the report submitted by Chuck Tague. Where appropriate sections of Chuck's report have been copied, and noted by a "CT" footnote.

1. Species:

Lewis's Woodpecker, *Melanerpes lewis* - CT

2. Number of birds:

One individual - CT

Age/sex/plumage:

sex and age not determined - CT

3. Date(s):

October 20, 2002 - CT

4. Location (include county)

Allegheny Front/Central City Hawk Watch in Bedford County, just east of
the border from Somerset County. - CT

5. Observers:

George Bercik, Gene Flament, Nancy Flament, Janet Kuehl, Tom Kuehl,
Rosemary McGlynn, Evelyn Merriman, Che Mincone, Marion Mincone,
Jeff Payne, Jim Rocco, Linda Sporrer, Tom Sporrer, Kate St. John, Chuck
Tague and Joan Tague.

All these observers are active and experienced hawk watchers at the
Allegheny Front site. The Flaments, the Kuehls, McGlynn, the Mincones,
Payne, Rocco and the Tagues are counters/site coordinators. All but the
Kuehls have at least five years experience as site coordinators. Bercik,
Merriman, L. Sporrer and St. John are regular spotters and observers. -
CT

5b. Documentor:

Tom Kuehl

Mailing Address:

Tom Kuehl
 3615 Hilty Road
 Export, PA 15632
 (724)325-1918
 tjkuehl@westol.com

Others agreeing with identification:

All present

Observers NOT agreeing with identification:

none

6. Description of bird (size, shape, proportions, details of both color and patterns on head, back, chin, throat, breast, flanks, undertail, wings, and tail, etc.; coloration of soft parts: bill, eye, legs and feet) include only details actually seen in the field:

From the narrative I wrote on October 21, 2002

I was standing near the owl pole. I was facing northwest and observed the bird as it flew north to south over the entire length of the clearing of the hawk watch. I spotted it independently of any sighting by other hawk watchers. My immediate observation was that it was woodpecker – this was based on the long beak and general appearance – I observed no undulating flight. I heard no flight call. I followed the bird with binoculars waiting for it to turn into a flicker – it never did. Other than its red belly the bird gave a strong overall dark appearance, but not black. My eyes were drawn to the substantial amount of red on the belly. The bird was smaller than a Flicker and at least as big as a Red-bellied.

7. Description of behavior:

In a steady flap that was fast enough to maintain a level flight height, the bird flew from north to south across the clearing of the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch.

8. Description of vocalizations:

None

9. Description of immediate and surrounding habitat(s):

The ridge of the Allegheny Front is dry Oak/Hickory forest. The tree composition around the site is Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*), Chestnut Oak (*Q. montana*), Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), Black Oak (*Q. velutina*), Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*) and Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*). The shrub and understory species are Mountain

Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Scrub Oak (*Q. ilicifolia*), Blueberries (*Vaccinium spp.*) and Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*).

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From Winkler: "In winter food supply is the most important aspect of habitat selection, and oak woodlands and commercial orchards (almond, walnut, pecan) are common winter settings; local supply of corn may also be important."

Although the forest along the Allegheny Front, both at and north of the hawk watch site, would seem to have adequate food for a Lewis's Woodpecker, the mast this year is meager.

Also from Winkler: "winter altitudinal range spans from sea level to 200 m." The 2,700 feet elevation at the Allegheny Front Hawk Watch, although high by Pennsylvania standards, is well within the range of Lewis's Woodpecker. - CT

10. Viewing conditions:

The trajectory and height of the bird in relation to the mid morning autumn sun provided ideal viewing conditions for me and the other observers. - CT

Optical equipment used for observation (type, power)

I observed the bird with Baush & Lomb Elite 8 X 42 binoculars

Distance/ how measured?

I did not do any actual measurements. However, estimating that the bird passed at least 50 feet to the west of me, and that it flew at a height of maybe 50 feet (just above the tree line), an estimate of the distance would be around 75 feet.

The bird was observed from:

I spotted the bird while standing near the owl pole, which would be about 1/3 of the distance from the southern perimeter of the watch site.

Time(s) of observation:

9:10 EST - CT

Total time of observation:

3 to 5 seconds

Weather (including regional or national weather patterns if relevant)/

From the Hawk Migration Association of North America Eastern Hawk Report form that I filled out as site coordinator.

At 09:00 a light wind was blowing from the southwest. The temperature was 7°C and cloud cover was 30%. The clouds were high and to the west of the site. - CT

skyconditions/ relative position of the sun :

The report form lists sky condition and visibility as clear. At the Allegheny Front that means we had visibility up to 25 miles to the east. CT

The bird passed slightly to the west of me. It was more to the west of the all the other observers except Jeff Payne. With a clear sky and a mid-morning October sun shining over the shoulders of the observers viewing conditions could not have been more ideal. - CT

11. Previous experience with this species and similar species:

I have never seen a Lewis's Woodpecker before. However, it was a target bird along with other western woodpeckers on an August 2001 trip to several areas of Northern California. Accordingly, I had spent time both before, and during the trip, reviewing western woodpecker species in field guides. Upon completing my observation of the bird, immediately after my mind had eliminated the bird as being a flicker, my next thought was to refer to a Sibley's guide to determine which western woodpecker it was.

12. Please eliminate other similar species and/or hybrids (use additional paper, if necessary):

Without any conscious thought my mind had told me this was a woodpecker, and not one that I am used to seeing on a regular basis. Why? The lack of white, the general darkness of the bird, but I have to think the clincher was the bright red belly. The other clincher was the collection of dumb-founded looks on the faces of the other observers, which confirmed to me that this is a bird we were all not accustomed to seeing. I was most struck by such a look on the face of Jeff Payne – he was to the south and west of me and had been the first face I saw as I dropped my binoculars from my eyes as the bird had almost flown directly over him.

13. Where photos obtained?

No

14. Books & illustrations consulted, and advice received

Field guides reviewed were Sibley's and Kaufman's.

How did these influence this description?

The guides did not influence the description. They did however confirm that our observations were a match with a Lewis's Woodpecker, and not a match for any other woodpecker.

15. How long after the observation were field notes recorded?

I can't recall if I made written notes on the day of the sighting. However, my computer files indicate that I saved a file of my notes on the day following the observation.

16. How long after observation was this form completed?

This form completed on December 1, 2002

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

17. Additional remarks:

None

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Kuehl II". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Thomas J. Kuehl II

Date:

December 1, 2002

The documentation form is adapted from the form used by:

IORC Secretary c/o Avian Ecology Program,
Natural Heritage Division/Dept. of Natural Resources, Springfield, IL 62701
REVISED AUGUST 1998

Lewis' Woodpecker

504-01-2002

Jeff Payne
9755 Glades Pike
Berlin PA 15530
814 267-5718

10-20-02

9:10 a.m.

Swarovski 10x42 SLE

~48° clear with few high clouds

Allegheny Plateau Audubon's Allegheny front Hawk watch, Bedford County PA (within 150-200yds of Somerset Co Line)

While walking into the hawkwatch and nearly (within 50yds) ~~at~~ ^{to} where the Allegheny front drops into the hills & valleys of Bedford Co I observed a flicker sized bird flying in from the North flying South approximately 30' above tree tops (trees ~60' tall) first impression before raising binoculars was flicker but bird appeared dark and had a pronounced deep flex at the carpus on down stroke, through binoculars the bird had distinct rusty-red belly, was lighter gray on upper breast and lower neck and otherwise appeared dark ~~to~~ ^{to} ventral wings and tail and head. The bird flew directly overhead and back could not be seen from my vantage but upper wings also appeared dark. I could not see face pattern during my view - total time observed - 1-2 seconds ~~and~~ bare-eyed + 5-6 seconds with binoculars. There were many other observers at the hawk watch and at least half observed the bird including Chuck Toague who also will write it up from his vantage 20 to 30 yards to the bird's left.

After the bird passed there was a short silence, I ventured the Lewis' Woodpecker identification, but immediately tried to come up with differentials

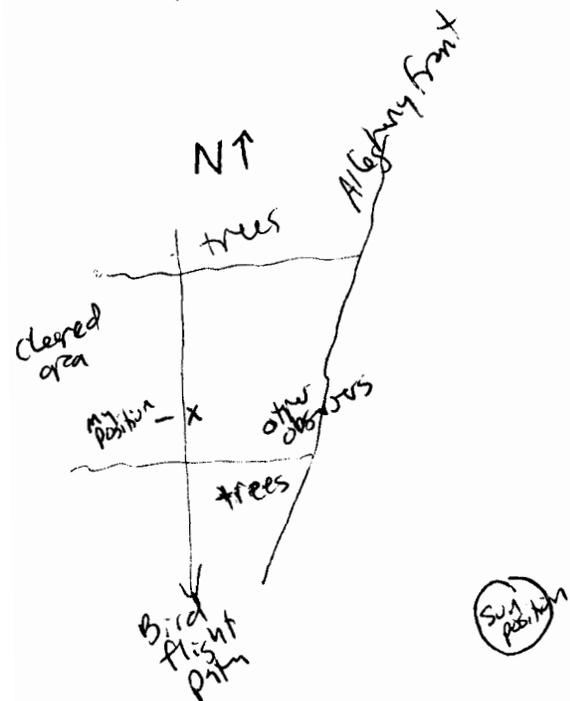
due to rather extreme extralimital occurrence. The woodpecker silhouette and rasy red belly tended to quickly rule out flycatchers; marked (dyed) bird causing red belly considered but no other woodpecker or similar sized bird fit the observations even without the red belly. An exotic escapee does not seem likely.

Other observers reported a green sheen to back and a fork to tail tip (Marion Mincore)

I previously ~~sp~~ have spent 1/2 day observing a colony of these woodpeckers at Ft. Simcoe State Park in Washington - the ^{deep} wing beats are fairly distinctive.

I realize that this is a significant PA sighting and that observation time was brief. I am glad there were multiple observers. I wish there were photographs. I don't envy the committee making a decision on this one.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Payne, DVM



Main Identity

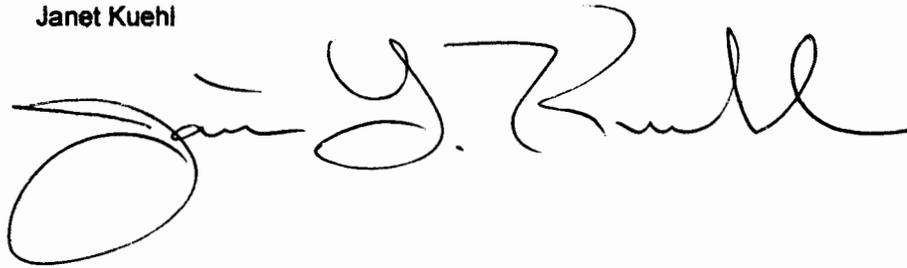
504-01-2002

From: "Tom Kuehl" <tjkuehl@westol.com>
To: "Nature Observer News" <bluejay@city-net.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 23, 2002 1:01 PM
Subject: Lewis's Woodpecker

My first impression of the bird as it flew towards us was a flicker-sized bird that appeared to be a woodpecker but did not fly like any woodpecker I had ever seen before. It was very dark. As the bird flew closer I kept waiting to see some type of coloring that was going to change this strange woodpecker into a flicker but it never happened. My best look occurred when the bird flew overhead. I saw no white markings on the wings at all and I looked very carefully. Again just dark head and body but when the bird passed over my head the belly was a beautiful scarlett or ruby in color. It was so striking in contrast to the dark body. On page 203 of the Kaufman Focus Guide there is a picture of a Lewis's Woodpecker in flight. To put it simply that is what I saw on October 20, 2002, 9:10 EST at The Allegheny Front Hawkwatch.

Observed with a Zeiss 7x42's

Janet Kuehl



(was standing right by Chuck Tague)

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Lewis's Woodpecker (Melanerpes lewis)

Date of Sighting: 20 October 2002 to 20 October 2002

Location: ALLEGHENY FRONT HAWKWATCH

County: BEDFORD

Observer(s): Chuck Tague and multiple observers

Date of Submission: 2002

Submitted by: Chuck Tague et al

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

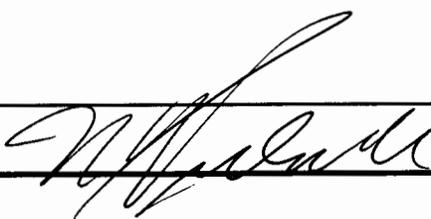
Specimen: No

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. Heathcote		X						
P. Hess		X						
J. Stanley		X						
E. Witmer				X				
R. Leberman		X						
M. Sharp		X						
TOTALS		6		1				
DECISION		X						

Comments: 6/1

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 6/8/03