

**PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE**  
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

12 February 2002

Randy C. Stringer  
409 Shady Drive  
Grove City, PA 16127

Dear Randy,

Thank you for submitting documentation on the following species. After careful review, the Committee regrets that it cannot accept these records based on the documentation received.

**Trumpeter Swan near Leesburg May 5-15, 1999:** Five members voted for acceptance in Class V as a correctly identified species representing an escape or an introduced bird not yet established in Pennsylvania. Two members voted against acceptance, believing that all of the necessary details were not listed for a diagnostic identification. These included the shape of the culmen and the exact degree of eye "isolation." In addition one member noted that a lack of bare yellow facial skin in the loreal area is not diagnostic for Trumpeter Swan; it is sometimes absent in Tundra Swan as well. A minimum vote of 6-1 is required in the PORC bylaws for acceptance.

**Cave Swallows at Moraine State Park on November 25, 1999:** The vote was three in favor of acceptance and four not in favor. The dissenters felt that Cliff Swallows could not be conclusively eliminated in complete plumage detail by a sighting of fast-flying birds in poor light and rain at a minimum of 100 yards.

On this date, the increasing late-fall pattern of Cave Swallow vagrancy along the Atlantic Coast and Great Lakes does imply that Cave may be more likely than Cliff. A majority of the Committee, however, felt that much more detail would be required before adding this species to the provisional state list of sight records.

If it is any consolation, consider that Ontario's third provincial record was documented with 14 pages of details and photographs (Curry, B., and K. A. McLaughlin. 2000. The November 1999 Cave Swallow invasion in Ontario and northeastern North America. Ontario Birds 18: 13-26).

**Brewer's Blackbirds at Pennsy Swamp on November 13, 1999:** Members opinions' were divided, and the balloting went two rounds (which partly explains the delay in informing you of the result). The final vote was one in favor and six not in favor.

The dissenting members raised a variety of concerns, primarily what they felt were insufficient details lacking a description of bill shape and explicit comparison with other species.

One member summarized the general feeling this way: "Given that one of the birds was said to be a 'fall variant' Brewer's with brown feather edges on chest, head, and lower back (i.e. looking even more similar to a fall Rusty Blackbird), it becomes more important to include thorough descriptions. Finally, size relative to other blackbird species is not mentioned at all."

As you know, non-acceptance does not imply that you did not identify any of these birds incorrectly, but rather that the documentations in some members' view were not sufficient to support the identifications conclusively. We trust that this will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities you find.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chairman

Records #105-03-1999 (Trumpeter Swan), 576-01-1999 (Cave Swallows), 861-05-1999 (Brewer's Blackbirds)

576-01-1999

## CAVE SWALLOWS IN MERCER COUNTY FALL, 1999

During the months of October and November 1999, an unusual influx of Cave Swallows was seen in the northeastern states. Locations of note include Point Pelee National Park and Cape May, New Jersey. Extensive sight and photographic identification have validated and verified that this species was, indeed, present in these and many other localities. Obviously, from the numerous accounts given, the birds came from the southwest populations in Texas and, somehow, found their way northeast. Weather patterns demonstrate that very strong fronts containing southwest winds and large amounts of precipitation were responsible for the influx of the birds.

A stellar birder in Pennsylvania, Jerry McWilliams, identified a swallow species at Presque Isle State Park in October that had the potential of being the state's first record. However, due to the distance away from the bird and the limited amount of viewing time, Jerry did not believe that he could positively identify the bird as a Cave Swallow.

On November 25, 1999, I spent two hours birding Moraine State Park in Butler County between the hours of 7 and 10. Temperatures were in the high 30's, the sky was overcast, and winds were light & southerly, while there was no precipitation of note. Birds were present everywhere and extremely active. I was able to tally fifty-four species during this time period. The afternoon weather changed dramatically with gradually rising temperatures, increased wind from the southwest and the threat of rain in the forecast. In fact, the prognosticators were calling for heavy downpours overnight, continuing on into the next day.

During the evening of November 25 and the early hours of November 26 the rains, indeed, did fall. I spent the majority of the day indoors unable to venture out due to the incessant rain and high winds from the west-southwest. Around 2:15 PM the rain decreased and the winds lightened up a bit. I headed for Lake Wilhelm in northern Mercer County, about twenty miles north of Grove City.

Beginning at the southeastern end of the lake I stopped at each overview, only to be disappointed by the lack of waterfowl. After an hour of painstakingly seeking a few species I arrived at Boat Launch #2, near the south central part of the lake. The rain was steady, but not overtly heavy. Winds were moderate from the west and then died down to only a light breeze. Temperatures were low to mid 50's, but there was a distinct chill in the air due to the rain.

It was at this site that I did spot a small raft of ducks just off to the northwest, near the middle of the lake. They were in a head-tucked position and drifting on the now-calm lake. It was able to identify 48 Lesser Scaup, 5 Gadwall, and 18 Bufflehead. Scanning this flock I was able to also identify 3 Common Scoters- a male and two females.

My Kowa Fluorite Lens came in handy with the overcast skies and steady falling rain. There was no noticeable fog over the water and waves were not a factor in the identification of the duck species just listed. My eyepiece has 20-60 power capacity that functions quite well, even under inclimate conditions as were present on this day.

No sooner had I scanned the flock and identified the species than a small flock of five swallows came into my scope's field of view and headed from left to right (west to east). Obviously I was surprised by their appearance and I concentrated my efforts upon identification of the species, given my knowledge of the swallow sightings earlier in the

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fall. After an hour of cautious and careful viewing of the birds at a distance of 100 yards (at their closest). I was able to determine that I had three Tree Swallows and two Cave Swallows. Size, flight and color comparisons were all noted in my notebook during my time of observation.

The Tree Swallows consisted of two adult birds and one immature. The deep bluish green back with the pure white underbelly and chest clearly identified the adult birds while the overall brownish back and buffy underparts identified the immature. The much larger Purple Martin was easily eliminated, as well as the sleeker and longer tailed Barn Swallow. No breast band was present on the immature and the deeper buffy-breasted Rough-Winged Swallow was not among the birds.

My study of the Cave Swallows was quite intense. In fact, after a while of observing both species together, I concluded that the Cave's were much more acrobatic in their flight patterns, often going higher into the air than the Tree's. The species did overlap in their feeding over the lake, allowing for a great contrast in the flight patterns and the color of both birds.

Based on my time of observation, I also believe that one Cave was an adult and one was an immature due to its overall lighter appearance. In distinction from the Tree Swallow, each Cave had a squared off tail that was reminiscent of a Cliff Swallow. The wings, distinguished from a Cliff, were nearly brown in coloration with only a hint of a blackish back, more pronounced in a Cliff.

So, from above I could clearly see on the Cave Swallow a brownish coloration on the tail, wings, and back. The rump was clearly orange, flaring up into the back and onto the tail, yet clearly defined and located predominantly in the rump. The neck area, between the back and head, was lighter overall, set off from a dark cap on the head.

Underneath the bird I could see a white to buffy white coloration that extended up to the throat area, whereupon another patch of orange ran from the lower neck up to the bill. These field marks were clearly seen during my study time on both birds.

The distinct coloration of the Cave Swallow on the forehead is not necessarily definitive in the identification due to the same coloration present in the southwestern race of the Cliff Swallow. In any event, the distance from the bird did not clearly permit me to conclude conclusively of the color in this area of the bird's body. I did stay with the birds until 4:25 or so when the light was getting poor and night was setting in on the lake.

Unfortunately, not one of the swallows could be found at this location the next day by competent birders. I did, however, receive an e-mail from Jerry McWilliams that a birder from Ohio did see a swallow species the next day after my sighting at Pymatuning Reservoir- just northwest of Lake Wilhelm- about twenty fives miles from my sighting. The birder watched the swallow for a good while, but could not say positively that it was a Cave Swallow.

Another e-mail arrived only two days later than more Cave Swallows had shown up at Cape May (possibly on the heels of the same large storm that passed through western Pa during the time of my sighting). This sighting would constitute the first visual sighting for PA. Weather and distance conditions did not permit photography. Climatal changes also were responsible for the birds moving out of the area.

Randy C. Stringer

Transcribed from field notes taken on November 26, 1999.

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Ballot - Round One**

Species: Cave Swallow ( Petrochelidon fulva )

Date of Sighting: 25 November 1999 to 25 November 1999

Location: MORaine STATE PARK

County: ~~MERCER~~ *Butler*

Observer(s): Randy Stringer

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Randy Stringer

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Recording: No			Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead			X					
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes				X				
B. Reid			X					
P. Rodewald				X				
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			3	3	1			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 3/4/0

Signature (Secretary): *[Handwritten Signature]*

Date: *11/15/00*