

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", written in a cursive style.

For the Committee:
Paul Hess, Chairman

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

861-05-1999

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD IN MERCER COUNTY

Pensey Swamp is located in the southeastern sector of Mercer County. It borders Lawrence County, near to the area that local birders call Volant Strips. Mercer County birders know of its reputation for marsh birds, both as nesters and migrants.

The Fall Season often hosts several thousand blackbirds that roost in the cattail marsh on the Mercer County side of Pensey (the other side of the marsh is known as Black Swamp). In the early to late fall the predominant species is the Red-Winged Blackbird. Yet, all during the months of September-November there are Brown-Headed Cowbirds, Rusty Blackbirds, Common Grackles and the ubiquitous European Starling.

With the coming of colder temperatures, fewer and fewer blackbirds are noted. Yet, it is always worth a look, especially in the evening when the birds come in to roost. The early evening of November 13th found me waiting on the border of the two counties where Pensey and Black Swamp meet.

At 4:30 PM a northbound movement of Red-wings, Cowbirds and a few Rustys was noted. The distinct advantage of being situated in this locale is the location of several deciduous trees that the some birds use as a temporary stopover before they go into the marsh proper for the rest of the night.

Temperatures were mild (50's); wind was insignificant; there was no precipitation falling and cloudcover prevented the distortion of colors. While scanning the trees just above me, I detected with my 8x42 B&L Elites two blackbirds in a group of thirty individuals that were predominantly black all over with medium-length tails.

Both birds were perched side-by-side and uttering a curious call that was a two-note variety similar to the one found in the National Geographic Guide. It resembled a liquid *que-ee*. From my birding jaunts to the western states on ten occasions I knew the call to be non-rusty and non-grackle, indicative of a brewer's.

Fortunately, I was able to study the two birds for nearly fifteen minutes while they preened and called, not forty feet above my head. In distinction to the Rusty Blackbird, this one individual was blackish throughout with a restricted area of brown barring on the chest, head and lower back only. The wings, rump, tail and lower abdomen were blackish without any semblance of rusty color (featuring the appearance what some field guides call a fall variant). The other bird was quite black overall with a gloss to the head that was a bit demure from summer plumage, but wholly in keeping with a Brewer's glossy sheen.

To my knowledge this species has not been seen in Mercer County for some time, but obviously it is a regular, but rare visitor to Western Pa in the fall season given the number of sightings in Butler County by Gene Wilhelm and in Beaver County, reported by Bill Hintze.

Randy C. Stringer

Transcribed from notes dated 11/13/99

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Brewer's Blackbird (Euphagus cyanocephalus)

Date of Sighting: 13 November 1999 to 13 November 1999

Location: PENSEY SWAMP

County: MERCER

Observer(s): Randy Stringer

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Randy Stringer

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

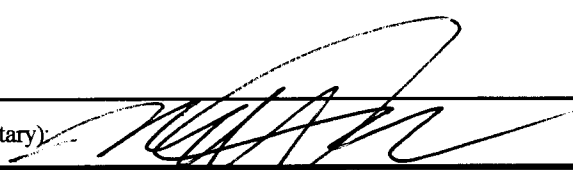
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				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			4	1	2			
DECISION								

Comments: 4/3 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round Two

Species: Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

Date of Sighting: 13 November 1999 to 13 November 1999

Location: PENSEY SWAMP

County: MERCER

Observer(s): Randy Stringer

Date of Submission: 1999

Submitted by: Randy Stringer

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

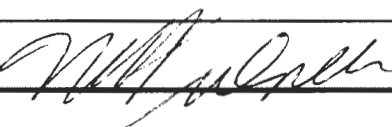
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
G. Armistead					X			
D. Couchman				X				
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes				X				
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald					X			
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			1	3	3			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 1/6

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 11/4/01