

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2017-11-03 01:25:40
Observer's Name	Dan Efroymsen
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Phone	2157791740
Observer's Address	555 Acorn St Philadelphia Pennsylvania 19128 United States
Names of additional observers	Tony Croasdale
Species (Common Name)	Swainson's Hawk
Species (Scientific Name)	Buteo swainsoni
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Light or Intermediate juvenile
Observation Date and Time	10-25-2017 3:30 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40139898
County	Philadelphia
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Philadelphia
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Manatawna Farms, Hagy's Mill Rd.
GPS coordinates of sighting	(40.0605,-75.2561)
Habitat	Open sloping field
Distance to bird	In flight / soaring at various distance, can't venture an accurate guess
Viewing conditions	Clear day, high afternoon sun caused challenging glare and shadow
Optical equipment used	Zeiss Victory SF 10x42

Description

Large-ish buteo, at various angles showing an obvious dihedral wing pattern. Nearby vultures provided very useful size reference, revealing this bird to be a relatively large, long-winged buteo. Viewed for several minutes at a healthy distance, soaring fairly high. In the bright sun the overall color impression underneath was a sun-washed pale color, finding contrast to identify field markings took time and concentration. As the bird soared more directly overhead, wings often in a slight tuck, the overall pale coloring started to reveal subtle field marks, showing a subtle contrast between lighter front-wing and less pale (i.e. slightly darker) trailing wing flight feathers. A darker impression of head revealed details of a "hood" look, darker except for a paler throat, subtle markings across lower throat/most upper part of breast completing the "hood" impression. Very little contrast between pale underside and relatively pale tail from underneath; no angle revealed any rust or banding or other contrast in the tail. No patagial mark or "windows" apparent on wings. After a full couple minutes viewing the bird, view was lost behind a tree momentarily. After a moment, re-found the bird soaring away from a distance East/NE, where an obvious light rump patch became clearly apparent, even at distance.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Viewed the bird soaring at various distances and angles, including directly overhead, along with vultures. Flew like a large buteo, wingspan wide or slightly tucked, very infrequent flapping, tail short and fanned or slightly narrowed. Notable that the bird at least once dove at and harassed a nearby vulture, providing useful size comparison.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

The initial view of the bird was looking West-SW, a back-lit buteo soaring with black and turkey vultures. The size comparison right alongside vultures suggested fairly large buteo, the long wings and soaring habit/ very infrequent flapping and short broad tail narrowed possibilities to a fairly large buteo. The relatively slender wings held in dihedral position initially caused the bird to blend with the turkey vultures, and caused doubt of the bird being one of our common red-tailed or red-shouldered hawks. As the bird continued to soar closer to overhead angle, there was no clear characteristic of a red-tailed hawk, as the bird lacked the rusty or light brown tail of an adult or immature red-tail; lacked dark patagial markings on wing leading edge; and lacked a belly-band. No characteristics of a red-shouldered hawk, lacking banding in tail, lacking "crescent windows" in wings, lacking red or markings in the upper breast/shoulders. The bird appeared too large and long-winged for a broad-winged hawk, lacking the thin dark wing outline. Lacked the long tail of an accipiter or northern harrier, lacked the facial disk of a harrier, and the size in comparison ruled out smaller birds. No obvious field marks suggesting any other likely buteo.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

The bird was first spotted by my birding companion Tony Croasdale, and we viewed the bird together for a good few minutes, occasionally looking away to view Sibley app images on smartphones and discussed our observations/impressions. As the fieldmarks of common local buteo species never seemed to appear, Tony, a bit more seasoned and more traveled birder than myself, initially introduced the possibility of Swainson's, and I initially was the skeptic / contrarian. I've seen dozens of Swainson's on multiple visits to Colorado; however, my visits were mostly in summer and therefore my experience generally was limited to the classic adult with obvious 2-toned wing contrast and obvious slender wing extension, while this bird was more subtly contrasted and spent much of the viewing time in a slightly tucked wing position. However, as we continued to review Sibley app imaging including the immature Swainson's plumages, I started to realize that the mystery bird, by process of elimination, seemed to align better with juv. light to intermediate Swainson's than any other possibility we could come up with, though I was still playing the skeptic about communicating a definitive ID, in which Tony was more confident. Tony communicated the sighting as an "interesting buteo" on social media, though I did mention the suspected juv. Swainson's ID when questioned. Then, in an interesting turn of events, Tony forwarded to me an image of pale subtly contrasted Light-phase juv. Swainson's Hawk taken at Ashland DE. hawkwatch, and as soon as I saw the photo, I thought I was looking at our bird again. The only notable difference is the photo showed a bit more buffy pale tone underneath while my impression of our view in the bright sun seemed just a bit more washed -out grayish pale, however all the contrast points aligned exactly as well as the shape, down to the slight wing tuck position, and the grey washed tone can easily be attributed to more severe sun glare. I hesitate to add any attempting drawing as the Ashland photo much better represents our bird than any other image or drawing I could come up with.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

After seeing the the Ashland photo and how it aligned with our view of the bird at Manatawna Farms, and after spending time pouring over other references, I have a higher degree of confidence every time I try to come up with another possibility.

During

Sibley App

After

Sibley's field guide; Liguori Hawks at a Distance and Hawks from every angle; Stokes field guide to Hawks of North America; The Crossley ID guide

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