

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2019-11-02 16:02:23
Observer's Name	Greg Grove
E-mail	gwg2@psu.edu
Phone	8146433295
Observer's Address	9524 Stone Creek Ridge Road Huntingdon PA 16652 United States
Names of additional observers	none
Species (Common Name)	Swainson's Hawk
Species (Scientific Name)	Buteo swainsoni
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Possibly dark morph but uncertain due to back-lighting.
Observation Date and Time	10-15-2019 12:50 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Not yet (please do, eBird is great!)
County	Mifflin
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Allensville, Menno Twp.
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Stone Mt Hawk Watch on ridge , 1/3 mile NE of Allensville road crossing of ridge-top.
GPS coordinates of sighting	N 40.57178, W -77.82636
Habitat	In flight past hawk watch on Stone Mt., on east side
Distance to bird	Initially approaching from well upridge, eventually came past the watch platform at a distance of perhaps 100-200 yards.
Viewing conditions	Good though somewhat backlit. Cloud cover 50%. Light SE wind.
Optical equipment used	Swarovski 10-32 EL

Description

Size of Red-tail or bigger. Impression as it approached was of bird in steady glide (not rocking like TUVU, harrier) with long slender wings held in a strong dihedral (more pronounced than TUVU and harrier) and with tips pulled back noticeably but not extremely so.

Position of wings during glide/soaring an excellent match for upper right panel on page 64 of Liguori's Hawks at a Distance

Overall color was fairly dark, possibly in part because of back-lighting. Flight feathers were slightly darker than wing coverts although this did not stand out and I would not have noticed were I not aware of Swainson's plumage (two-toned wings pattern).

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

Seen in gliding flight approaching hawk watch, moving from NE to SW parallel to ridge, i.e. typical of fall movement of raptors on E/SE wind at this location. At one point, closest to my location, it made several circles gaining elevation, before continuing glide to SW.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

With dihedral I considered Harrier, but good look at dorsal during circling to gain elevation clearly showed no white rump typical of harrier. The large size and dark color not a match at all for harrier. Dihedral more pronounced than gliding/soaring Harriers. Also, steadier flight than harrier (less rocking). Dark color and shape (dihedral) absolutely eliminated Osprey. Shape (especially long slender wings in dihedral) not at all like other eastern buteos and eagles routinely seen at hawk watches. Wings too slender for eagles. Golden Eagles may show slight dihedral but I've never seen any nearly as pronounced as this bird.

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

ID was made primarily on shape of wings, position of wings, size - rather than on plumage characteristics. One favorable factor was the extended viewing time (2 minutes) and relatively close approach to the watch, giving more time to study closely shape, behavior than we get for many raptors.

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

Having seen tens of 1000s of raptors soaring and gliding over 29 years of hawk-watching at this location, I am confident this was not one of our expected eastern migrant raptors nor a TUVU. I am 99% certain of ID but fully understand the difficulties associated with this species at hawk watches and reluctance to accept sight records without photo doc..

After

Liguori - Hawks at a Distance, Wheeler - Hawks of eastern North America, Peterson Guide to Hawks of North America (Clark, Wheeler)

Click to edit

PORC-webform00113