

## PA Rare Bird Report

<b>Submission Date</b>	2020-06-01 13:26:12
<b>Observer's Name</b>	John Forcey
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<b>Phone</b>	814-553-5491
<b>Observer's Address</b>	520 Nichols St Clearfield PA 16830 United States
<b>Names of additional observers</b>	none
<b>Species (Common Name)</b>	Prairie Falcon
<b>Species (Scientific Name)</b>	Falco mexicanus
<b>Number of individuals</b>	1
<b>Observation Date and Time</b>	05-16-2020 11:30 AM
<b>Did you submit this sighting to eBird?</b>	Yes
<b>Link to eBird checklist</b>	<a href="https://ebird.org/checklist/S69177933">https://ebird.org/checklist/S69177933</a>
<b>County</b>	Clearfield
<b>Location (City, Borough, Township)</b>	Karthaus Township
<b>Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)</b>	north of Tipple Road
<b>GPS coordinates of sighting</b>	41.130169, -78.105995
<b>Habitat</b>	Reclaimed stripmine, now flat grassland with potholes that temporarily hold water, the area also holds prey species for Prairie Falcon such as Eastern Meadowlarks, Horned Larks, Bobolinks, a small breeding population of Killdeer and other transient shorebirds, as well as various sparrow species.
<b>Distance to bird</b>	estimate 50' to 75' overhead
<b>Viewing conditions</b>	no obstruction, partly cloudy day, excellent viewing conditions
<b>Optical equipment used</b>	Eagle Optics 8X42 binocular

**Description**

medium sized raptor, falcon shape with long pointed wings and long squared off-tail, color below generally light, did not notice details of breast markings, black axillaries and wing linings to at least half of wing length were very distinct from general light color of underparts, face showed distinct moustache stripe

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

first observed already overhead, circled a couple of times, stooped on some unidentified prey bird, missed, circled a few more times, then flew off.

**Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)**

shape and behavior indicated a falcon species, not an accipiter or Buteo, lack of wide hood (or helmet) indicated not a Peregrine Falcon, large size and lack of correct coloration indicated not a Kestrel. I thought for all of the above reasons that it must be a Merlin, but it was not dark below, whereas Merlins I have seen in Pennsylvania look almost black at first glance. Nevertheless, my conclusion was that it must be some color morph of a Merlin, or less likely a Peregrine. Really everything I could see about the bird ruled out Peregrine as much as Kestrel, but Merlin did not seem right either.

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

I did not decide that I had been looking at a Prairie Falcon until I returned to my vehicle and checked the Nat Geo book to see if there was any info regarding color morphs of Merlins. Then I noticed that the characteristics that I had seen were perfect for Prairie Falcon. I mention this to explain why I did not make a greater effort to register in my mind all details of the bird. When I was looking at it, I did not think of Prairie Falcon. I thought it an odd looking bird, but did not consider that it might be a species so far out of its range.

I have been birding for over 30 years, have seen many Kestrels, a smaller number of Peregrines, and fewer still of Merlins. Of Prairie Falcon I recall seeing but one, maybe two.

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

I am positive, lacking any information relative to some color variety of one of the other species of falcon. The characteristics that I observed on the underside of the breast and wings and on the head of the bird were those of Prairie Falcon.

**After**

immediately after viewing - National Geographic Field Guide..., Third Edition;  
later at home - Sibley Guide to Birds, First edition

**Click to edit**

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