

Swallow-tailed Kite

Unanimously Accepted 7-0

Committee Member Comments:

CM1: Although it would have been nice to have a photographic record, I believe the description of the bird is good for Swallow-tailed Kite. In addition, the behavior also fits this species. Despite the fact that the submitter didn't go into a lot of detail with respect to ruling out similar species, like he stated, the bird is "unmistakable."

CM2: These kinds of records are always the most difficult for me to evaluate personally. I am, for the most part, against voting for records that lack physical evidence. However, the By-Laws are quite clear that this is not how voting is to take place, and the record is to be voted on based on its own merits. In this case, we have an experienced and careful observer. Moreover, we have a species which is difficult to confuse with another likely candidate. Swallow-tailed Kites are not frequent falconry birds and there is nothing in the report to indicate captivity. The timing is reasonable. Thus, given the description, observer, and uniqueness of the species, a vote FOR this record is warranted based on the By-Laws.

CM3: Wonderful written description of an unmistakable species.

CM4: It's unfortunate that a photo wasn't available, as the submitter observed the bird for 10 minutes. Obviously a camera wasn't available, which happens often. The description of the bird articulated in the submission matches the description of a Swallow-tailed Kite, and the observers had a field guide in their possession at the time of the sighting. The sighting occurred in good lighting conditions, and was good enough to recognize the bird without binoculars, and while driving. This was a rare moment in time that many of us wish would occur more often! The submitter appears to be an experienced West Virginia birder who wrote field notes of the bird encounter immediately after the sighting. Without a photo, the field note documentation plays an important role in helping to recall key identification features. The feeding behavior of the bird that was observed by the submitter as eating while in flight, is similar behavior to Sibley's description that the Swallow-tailed Kite "plucks lizards and insects from treetops", and also that the bird "captures and eats insects in mid-air." A photo would make this report easy to accept without delay, but I support a FOR vote for this sighting, as it would be a shame to reject this record just for lack of a photo. Years ago, ornithologists relied heavily on only field descriptions to make positive identifications. Field sketches and notes written immediately after the sighting were valued, and the submitter did a mental recall of the identifying features of the bird while driving home after the sighting. Obviously standards have changed over time, and as a result, many serious birders now carry an arsenal of camera equipment to document their rare sightings. However, the Bylaws do allow for only written documentation for submissions (page 3 Section IV. BIRD RECORDS, under A).

CM5: I vote to include the Monroe County sighting of the Swallow-tailed Kite record for the official State List. The written evidence provides details of the found STKI to confirm the identity. The STKI was observed by two observers and meets the guidelines to be included without photographic evidence. Therefore, this report in my opinion meets the standards set by the by-laws for inclusion on the official State List.

CM6: Cannot be mistaken for anything else. Great find! CM7: Even though there are no pictures to verify, I still support the identification. The habitat and behavior are consistent with Swallow-tailed Kite and the bird is almost unmistakable to identify. The time of year is also consistent with post-breeding dispersal.