

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Gyr Falcon sighting in Nassau County, L.I.: On 26 January 1981, a white-phase Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) was seen at the Lawrence Golf Course, Lawrence, Nassau County, by Michael Scheibel, Steven Sanford, David Riehlman, and Paul Gaskin, all with the New York State Department of Environment Conservation. Our staff was conducting a trapping operation to band Brant (*Branta bernicla*) on their wintering grounds along western Long Island's south shore. The operation involves "cannon-netting" Brant that are feeding on the closely cropped grasses along various country clubs, parks and golf courses in Nassau County. The banding operation involves the use of silhouette and full-bodied decoys to entice the birds into the trap area.

At approximately 1630 hrs., as we approached the "rig," several Mallards flushed from among the decoys and as they flew off, the Gyr Falcon stooped in chasing the ducks and passed within 25 m. of the observers. The falcon pursued the ducks a short distance and then turned and flew directly overhead, returning in the direction he had appeared from, thus providing us with an excellent view. The falcon was nearly all white below, with noticeably dark-tipped pointed wings that were quite broad at the basal end, giving the bird a very powerful appearance.

The bird then flew to a nearby tree and perched for about ten minutes, affording us time to secure our 7x50 binoculars and approach within 100 m. of the perched falcon. At this point, the nearly all-white breast was clearly visible, and no facial markings were discernible. The bird subsequently flew from the perch and headed southward toward the "back" holes of the golf course. When last seen, the bird was continuing to harass the ducks feeding along the fairway, but was not observed making a kill.

The sighting was reported by Scheibel to the New York Rare Bird Alert on the following day. However, despite the efforts of a number of observers, the falcon was not sighted again for several days. Then on 6 February, the Gyr Falcon was again reported at West End, Jones Beach near the intersection of the Meadowbrook Parkway and Ocean Parkway.

[Eds. note: Some observers were fortunate to view the bird closely enough to see a very distinct dusky moustachial stripe and a dusky stripe through the eye. Those same observers noted the bluish cere and legs which marked this individual as an immature. The latest observation was made on 6 March in the Zach's Bay area of Jones Beach State Park by Kevin Malone. Between the date of its discovery and departure, it apparently ranged from the Lawrence marshes eastward to portions of Jones Beach State Park, and during that time it was seen by dozens of birders. It was seen to take waterfowl, including Brant and Black Duck.]

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