

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE IN SUBURBAN SUFFOLK COUNTY BACKYARD

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I am what you would consider a novice birder, casually observing birds as I go about my daily activities. A few years ago I started keeping lists including a backyard list which stands at some forty plus species .

On 13 Mar 2001, my 12 year old son, Scott, came running into the house excitedly telling me that there was an "eagle" in a tree across the street . I immediately rushed outside with a bird book and a pair of binoculars.

Sitting about thirty feet up in a maple tree, was not an eagle, but a large black- and-white bird, being harassed by agitated crows . To me, the bird seemed to be in some distress as indicated by his chest feathers being puffed out and the fact that it would place its head under its wing at times. Scott, myself, my neighbor Dennis Walsh and his two children, Nick and Brendan, all took turns looking through the binoculars and comparing our observations with various field guides.

Initially we were stumped, eliminating eagles, ospreys and hawks, but finally zeroed in on the plates of the Swallow-tailed Kite. Our bird had the all white head, black back and white front pictured, and of course the unique shape



Swallow-tailed kite

W. Sayville, NY

13 Mar 2001

Photo by Edwin Horning

of the tail clinched it. The only problem in my mind was that the maps in my guides all showed that the northern extent of this birds' range was the Carolinas?

We then took some photos . The one appearing here, was taken by nine-year old Nick Walsh and easily confirms the identification.

The kite spent some hours sitting on that branch and then left that same day. I have added this species to my backyard list and have been advised that it is probably the only such "yard"list in New York to contain this species.

Editor's Note

Through 1996 , there were some twenty-seven (27) documented records of this species in New York State (Dodge 1998, *in* Bull's Birds of New York State, E. Levine ed. ,Cornell University Press Ithaca, pgs. 180-181). Of these, eighteen (18) occurred in the spring. In recent years there have been increases in occurrences in neighboring states possibly indicating a northern extension of the range of the species.

The accompanying photo was taken with a simple "point and shoot" camera by nine-year old Nick Walsh and resulted in an unequivocal identification of the bird proving that one should not hesitate to take photographs because of the lack of sophisticated equipment.