

10-91-23

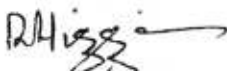
Q

16 Purdown Road,
Horfield,
Bristol,
BS7 9PG
Great Britain

Dear Records Committee,

I enclose a description of a common black-hawk for your consideration. I also enclose a copy of a list of birds seen on our trip to Colorado (which was most enjoyable). It was prepared primarily for the benefit of any other British birders who may be planning a trip to the state. If there are any other species on the list for which you require a description please let us know. Since the birds were virtually all new to us we took field notes on most of them.

Yours faithfully,


Rupert Higgins

ps All dates on the birdlist refer to June 1991.

COMMON BLACK-HAWK AT CARIZZO MOUNTAIN, BACA COUNTY

15th June 1991

At about 4-30 pm the observers, Rupert Higgins and Dawn Lawrence, were approaching Carizzo Mountain from the north-west. As we drove towards the mountain, a turkey vulture appeared over the ridge and drifted away to the west. We got out of the car to explore the area and a second raptor appeared. Even with the naked eye it was obvious that this bird was not a turkey vulture, its differences in structure being readily apparent. We watched it for about 10 minutes, for part of that time it was soaring with the turkey vulture. It then moved off to the west.

Description

A medium sized raptor, clearly smaller than a turkey vulture, although it appeared far more bulky. It had an extremely unusual shape, the secondaries being very long so that the wing was extremely broad - extending down the tail beyond the tail coverts so that no body extended behind the wings as in most birds of prey. The tail was fairly long, although it appeared short because of the width of the wings. The wings were held flat, with the leading edge at right angles to the line of the body and the primaries well spread, giving a fingered appearance to the wing. The head was large and prominent. The plumage was predominantly jet black. The secondaries had lines of small off-white flecks, giving the appearance of discontinuous pale barring. There were small white flashes at the primary bases. The tail was marked with a broad white band, both above and below, but otherwise appeared black. The white tips to the tail feathers were not seen. Yellow feet and bill were both visible. The bird's flight was very steady and rather eagle like. When it was soaring with the vulture the contrast in their soaring styles was very obvious, with the vulture rocking from side to side and shifting position and the hawk far more steady.

The bird was watched for about ten minutes through Carl Zeiss Dekarem 10x50 (RH) and Carl Zeiss Jenoptem 8x30 (DL) binoculars and briefly through a Nikon ED II fieldscope. The light was good and the bird was initially at a very low altitude - c100 feet above the ground.

We have not seen common black-hawk before or since. Before the 15th, however, we had already seen and watched turkey vulture, the 3 breeding Buteo species, golden and bald eagles and osprey and shortly afterwards we saw mississippi kite. We did not recognise the bird whilst watching it but identified it immediately afterwards using the National Geographic Guide. We later confirmed this using the Audubon society photographic guide. There is no doubt in either of our minds that it was a common black-hawk, both the shape and plumage of the bird ruling out any other species.

This was the first time we have visited the USA but we are both serious and experienced birders - RH for 16 years and DL for 9 years - in both Britain and continental Europe. We have both (RH in particular) had several records accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee. Before the 15th we had spent 8 days birding in Colorado.