

10-94-17

accepted

## SPECIES:

Harris Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

## DATE:

December 17, 1994

## TIME(S) OF OBSERVATION:

~ 09:15-09:30, ~10:30-10:50, &amp; ~12:45-13:15 MST

## LOCATION:

Waterton Bridge area - Between Chatfield State Park and Waterton Canyon

## COUNTY:

Jefferson County, Colorado

## OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY IDENTIFIED THIS BIRD:

Steve Stachowiak, 14846 East Caspian Place, Aurora, Colorado 80014

Joe Roller, 13040 West 16<sup>th</sup> Drive, Golden, Colorado 80401

Walt Hackney, 14426 'D' East Hawaii Circle, Aurora 80012

## OPTICAL EQUIPMENT USED:

Zeiss 10X40 binoculars and Discoverer 60mm (20X60 zoom) spotting scope

## WEATHER CONDITIONS:

SKY: Partly cloudy

WIND: Calm

TEMP: 32-45F

## BIRD/SUN ORIENTATION:

Mixed; During the longest views (on 2 separate occasions) the sun was from my back and shining upon the bird.

## DISTANCE FROM BIRD AND HOW MEASURED:

20 yards - 50 yards (estimate)

## NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN:

1 (one)

## SEX:

Unknown

## PLUMAGE:

Adult

## BEHAVIOR AND DEMEANOR:

The hawk seemed very wary and nervous, never allowing a close approach. The bird was usually seen near the top of a cottonwood or willow, although twice it was found lower in a tree (but always near the outer perimeter and not near the trunk of the tree). It was never seen harassing or being harassed by other birds. When perched the rusty-red leggings were very difficult to see. A few times when it raised its wings the hawk stood more erect and you could easily see the leggings and the full length of the legs themselves.

## NARRATIVE:

This hawk was first seen as Steve and I were walking downstream on the West side of the Platte River from the Waterton Bridge participating in the Denver Christmas Bird Count. The bird was flying upstream paralleling the river on the West side ~20 yards from the river. Steve commented on the rusty-red "shoulders", I commented on the tail pattern (white base with thick black band). We debated for a minute then decided to relocate this hawk. Minutes later we found it perched, his back to us. The bill appeared yellow and unusually long for a hawk (this stood out in my mind...I later learned I was seeing the bill plus the yellow cere, this made the bill appear to be quite large). The bird was almost between us and the sun (bird in silhouette) and we only had our binoculars and no scope. The thought of Harris' Hawk entered our minds quite rapidly (although neither of us had ever seen one before). The bird flew across the Platte River and continued upstream and disappeared (our sight blocked by cottonwood trees). We sat down and started independently writing a description of this hawk. We then (very quickly) walked/ran back to the car. On the Waterton Bridge we scanned all directions. We did see a rufous morph Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) perched in a tree. A quick look through the scope at the bill immediately eliminated him as "our hawk". We drove up the private dirt road upstream on the East side of the Platte River (I had secured permission several days prior from the landowner and the Denver Water Department). Approximately 60 yards up this road we spotted the hawk perched near the top of a willow located between the dirt road and the river. The bird was now only ~30 yards away! Again using binoculars we noticed the bill, cere and the rusty-red scapulars. Harris' Hawk confirmed! We then backed down the road and circled through the Martin Marietta Astronautics Plant (I work there) looking for Joe Roller's group. Joe and his group followed us to the Waterton Bridge. We relocated the bird as he flushed from another willow lower to the ground and watched him fly and disappear downstream. We gathered our things (Joe retrieved his camera) and started walking downstream on the West side. We relocated the hawk in the distance several times (He flushed while we were quite a distance away). At about 10:45 we found him approximately 1 mile downstream from the Waterton Bridge perched in the top of a tall cottonwood - sun to our backs. Joe Roller took several photographs with black&white film. Nearly 5 minutes later the hawk flew overhead, circled, and crossed the river over to the East side and flew upstream.

Joe and his group left to resume his count (satisfied of the identification). Steve and I completed our field notes and started walking downstream to continue our count. At 12:30 we met Walt Hackney and drove back to the Waterton Bridge. We gambled and found the hawk again perched between the dirt road and the river on the East side of the river. We used Steve's Discoverer spotting scope and had excellent looks at this hawk as he shifted his footing and raised his wings a few times. When he did this the red leggings could easily be seen.

**SIZE:**

This hawk seemed smaller than nearby Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) seen several minutes prior to the Harris' Hawk sighting.

**HEAD & NECK:**

Head and neck unmarked, dark brown

**EYES & LORES:**

Eyes dark brown; broad yellow cere extending back to the eye; A thin portion of the yellow cere reached part-way around the eyes (showing a thin yellow crescent around the top and bottom of the eyes).

**LOWER & UPPER MANDIBLES:**

Small hooked bill; tip black, small whitish mid-section, yellow base

**LEGS & FEET:**

Long bright yellow legs; no bands, no tethers, no marks on legs

**UPPERPARTS:**

Nape, back, and wings dark brown; scapulars rusty-red

**UNDERPARTS:**

Throat, breast and belly dark brown; white undertail coverts; rusty-red leggings (leggings seen well when bird raised its wings and stood more erect, hidden at other times)

**RETRICES:**

Thin white terminal band; thick (more than half the length of the tail) black sub-terminal band; white base of tail (approximately one-third the tail length); White tail base was not obvious on perched bird when viewed from behind (wings hide it), but very obvious in flight.

**WINGS:**

Medium length, broad, rounded tips

**UPPERWINGS:**

Dark brown primaries and secondaries; rusty-red scapulars and upperwing coverts. On perched bird the scapulars did not appear solid rusty-red but alternating dark brown marks on the lower edge

**UNDERWINGS:**

Dark brown primaries and secondaries; rusty-red wing linings (under wing coverts)

**VOCALIZATION:**

No vocalizations were heard during observations.

**ELIMINATION OF SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:**

In all cases I am comparing adult hawks (immatures usually have light colored beaks with dark streaks).

White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*) - Scapulars rusty-red, but breast and belly are not a uniform dark brown. Leggings are white and black sub-terminal band not as thick and extensive. White-tailed Hawk has white feathering surrounding the bill and no noticeable cere showing. Primaries and secondaries not dark brown. Wing linings white not dark rusty-red.

Common Black-Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) - Has a yellow cere and a thick black sub-terminal band on the tail. This hawk is black not dark brown like the hawk I saw. This hawk also lacks the rusty-red scapulars and leggings. This hawk also does not have a white uppertail (it has a white band between the black sub-terminal band and the black base of the tail).

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) - Large (way too large) buteo with reddish scapulars. Lacks the thick, black sub-terminal tail band. Ferruginous has reddish leggings like a Harris' Hawk but is not dark brown on the upper and underparts (except in the dark morph which is eliminated because of the white tail with no strong black sub-terminal tail band), Ferruginous also lacks the rusty-red wing linings. Primaries and secondaries not dark brown.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) - Smallish buteo with a black sub-terminal tail band. Black sub-terminal band not as thick as the hawk I saw. The tail of a Rough-legged dark morph usually has several tail bands (the light morph Rough-legged Hawk's tail looks better but the rest of the bird is too light, not dark brown like the bird I saw). Rough-legged Lacks the rusty-red scapulars, leggings and wing linings. Primaries and secondaries not dark brown.

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) - Small buteo with red scapulars. Lacks the single, thick, black sub-terminal tail band. Instead a Red-shouldered Hawk has multiple alternating black and white tail bands. Upper and lower body color not dark brown. Lacks yellow cere. Has a white throat unlike the bird seen at Waterton. Primaries and secondaries not dark brown.

All other buteos eliminated because they lack all or most of the features seen on "our" hawk.

Kites, falcons, accipiters, eagles eliminated for obvious reasons (size, shape, key marks, etc.).

#### PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES:

Harris' Hawk - This is the only one I have seen.

White-tailed Hawk - Have seen several in Southern Texas (both adults and immatures) in winter of 1989.

Common Black-Hawk - Have never seen one.

Ferruginous Hawk - Have seen many adults and immatures in both light and dark morphs in Colorado.

Rough-legged Hawk - Have seen many adults and immatures in both light and dark morphs in Colorado

Red-shouldered Hawk - Have seen several in California and Colorado (never in dark phase though).

#### BOOKS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND ADVICE CONSULTED THAT INFLUENCED THIS REPORT:

National Geographic Society "Field Guide to the Birds of North America" Second Edition used when I got back to car and confirmed my identification. Also used for scientific names and comparison of the hawk to other hawks.

#### COMMENTS:

This report was written from the notes taken in the field while observing this bird.

#### NAME:

Joey M. Kellner  
8612 West Hinsdale Place  
Littleton, Colorado 80123

SIGNATURE: Joey M. Kellner

DATE: 12/17/94

12/17/94 P/C, circa 32-45°  
 ~ 9:15-9:30 } 12:45-1:15  
 ~ 10:30-10:50 }  
 Flew around ALERT  
 River (Silhouette)  
 Landed in overland area  
 Perched in willow SE of Watson Bridge  
 Small size - smaller than RTHK seen earlier  
 Funny looking yellow bill, hooked (Bill looks unusually long)  
 Head Dark Brown  
 Breast & Body Dark Brown  
 Black tip  
 white midsection (small)  
 yellow base & core

Underwings Brownish-black, front of underwing (no mottling) Rufous lining  
 Back & wings Dark Brown on sitting bird  
 Shoulders/scapulars in flight top of wing Rusty-red  
 Tail upper white

Long Black sub-terminal band on tail  
 white tip of tail (narrow band)

Legs light yellow - no bands  
 white under tail coverts  
 shoulders Dark red (scapulars)

Rusty leggings seen @ 12:55pm  
 Joe Roller took several B&W pictures

Close approach NOT allowed by bird  
 Dark brown rusty-red  
 Marks on scapulars when seen through STEURS scope in PM



Harris' Hawk?

YES!

Large than bird  
 RTHK phase  
 Near Watson  
 Bridge

Original Field Notes

JK



10-94-17

