

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD ☒UNUSUAL RECORD ☐

Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: Harris' Hawk / Parabuteo unicinctus
(Vernacular Name) (Scientific Name)Date(s): Dec. 20, 1994Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: Adult

Latilong: _____ Distribution Code: _____ Habitat Code: _____

Locality: Waterton Bridge across S. Platte River Elevation: _____Nearest town: Littleton County: JeffersonTime(s) observed: 11:35 - 11:40 amDuration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): ~ 5 minutesOther observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers): Karleen Schofield 936-8661
33 Yates St.
Denver, CO 80219Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers): Joey Kellner 978-1748
8612 W. Hinsdale Pl.
Littleton, CO 80120Light conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light): Bright, low winter light. The bird was first seen directly overhead and then with strong front lighting, both while it was flying and perching. Lighting couldn't have been better, with a cloudless sky.Optical equipment used (e.g. power, types): Zeiss 10x40 Binoculars
Bushnell Spacemaster Scope @ 40xDistance and how measured: Ranged from 50 ft. overhead to 300 yards away in a tree, where I briefly scoped it.

If photographed, type of equipment and film: _____

Who else photographed the bird: _____

Describe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying): The bird was first observed circling overhead, with fairly rapid, shallow wing beats followed by short glides. It circled north toward the highway maintenance shed and perched in the top of a medium sized cottonwood about 300 yards away. It was immediately mobbed by magpies andDescribe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observed in the field: This is an easy bird to ID in the field under the lighting conditions described. Identity is not the big question, but origin is. Overhead the bird appeared all dark, except for the very pronounced white band at the base of the tail. It was the approximate size and shape of other buteos, except its wings were quite broad and somewhat rounded. Wing shape was quite different from what we usually see in the area. As the bird circled

Accepted with

will continue to follow it for a while

away to the north, the overall dark brown coloration with bright chestnut patches on the upper wing and underwing coverts became apparent in the good light. Description (continued): The yellow beak and legs and feet also stood out. When the bird perched and I was able to get a scope on it, unfortunately there were many twigs obscuring the view. The chestnut shoulder patches were inconspicuous, and the chestnut thighs were obscured, as were the legs (i.e. no chance to look for band). The white terminal band on the tail was obvious, but the tail feathers or at least the tips looked ragged. The perched bird overall looked slightly frayed and not as sharp defined as I have seen elsewhere. Of course, it could have been somewhat fluffed because of the harassing corvids. When it flew again after a few minutes, the contrasting chestnut pattern showed along with the amount of white at the base of the tail. Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

N/A

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird:

Foot hills riparian and scrub grassland

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species?

The principal similarly appearing species would be dark-morph buteos, none of which have extensive white on the base of the tail and white tail coverts.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species?

I have observed this species closely and at length many times in Texas and Arizona, most recently in Nov. 1994, when I saw dozens in S. Texas.

List books, illustration, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) At time of observation: None

b) After observation: "Hawks" by Clark + Wheeler - I was sure of ID without consulting references

This report was written from reports made during _____, after observation _____, from memory X

Date and time report was written: 1:30 pm Dec. 20, 1994 (2 hours after sighting)

Reporting observer: J.B. Hayes Signature: J.B. Hayes

Address: 1517 W. Briarwood Ave. Littleton, CO 80120

All reports will be maintained permanently at the address below:

Return to: CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
CITY PARK
DENVER, CO 80205

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

10-94-17
Accepted

HARRIS' HAWK
Parabuteo unicinctus

Location: Waterton Canyon; Chatfield Reservoir area; Bridge over the S. Platte R.; Denver, Colorado

Date: December 23, 1994

Setting:

I spent about 3 hours looking unsuccessfully for this bird the previous week end. On this day I spent about an hour looking for it before I was successful. I saw it perched high in the biggest tree down stream from the Waterton bridge. I walked to the river bank on the other side of the river and observed the perched bird from 75 yards away in my scope (Kowa TSN4 20-60x). I was so close that the bird filled the field of view. I watched it from 3:40-4:02 p.m. The light was very good, but at a low angle. I only observed the perched bird, never in flight. It flew away when I glanced down at a fisherman and I missed the bird in flight. The area is a riparian corridor along the South Platte River as it emerges from the mountains. The surrounding area is rolling grassland with some farm land and areas of urban encroachment. The river flows into Chatfield Reservoir at this point.

Description:

The bird was an adult. It was a medium-sized, long-tailed buteo. In general it was about the size of a Red-tailed Hawk but was proportionately longer-tailed and rather small-headed. It was a dark bird overall. At a distance it was a dark chocolate-brown with the only spot of color the rufous shoulder patches. At close range the entire head, body and wings were a flat greyish-brown. The leggings and shoulder were a striking chestnut color. The tertials in the folded wing had paler edges. The tail was black in the center with a wide white terminal band (about 3/4") and a white base. The rump and base of tail were white. The wings reached to the base of the tail. The bill was blue-grey with a dark tip and was strongly hooked. The cere and gape were bright yellow. The eye was dark. The feet were grayish-yellow and the legs were free of bands or jesses. The tips of the tail was markedly frayed and worn.

Similar Species:

This was a Buteo, as could be seen by the large size, hooked bill, plump shape and medium-length wings. No other Colorado Buteo will have a white tail with a wide black band in the middle. The chestnut shoulders and leggings rule out other hawks. The identity of this bird is not in doubt. The provenance may be. For wildness: wariness; pattern of wandering in the fall-winter of 1994. Against wildness: frayed tail; falconry.

Experience With Species:

I have experience with all North American Buteos.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001

Mark Janos

Species: Harris' Hawk

Parabuteo unicinctus

10-94-17
Accepted

Date: 12/17/94

Time of Observation: The bird was seen intermittently within these three approximate ranges of time: 9:15 - 9:30, 10:00 - 10:45, & 12:30 - 12:40.

Exact Location: Along the South Platte River, both up and down stream from where the Waterton bridge crosses the river.

Nearest Town: Lakewood, Colorado County: Jefferson

Other Observers Who Independently Identified this Bird:
Joey Kellner & Joe Roller

Optical Equipment: Swift 8 X 40 binoculars, Bausch & Lomb
Discoverer Spotting Scope 15 X 60

Weather: Warm, sunny, no wind, high thin clouds later in the pm.

Bird/Sun Orientation: Varied

Distance from Bird: 20 to 50 Yards (estimated by sight)

Number of Birds Seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: Adult

Behavior and Demeanor: The bird was first observed about 20 yards high in the air flying past the spot we were standing. This afforded a brief "look" at the bird. We then went and located the spot where the bird landed. It had perched near the top of a Cottonwood tree. We observed the bird from a reasonable distance, but it was skittish and flew away. At the same distance the resident Red-tails do not flush as quickly, if at all. The bird remained wary and not readily approachable whenever it was subsequently found from that point on in time.

Head and Neck: The head and neck area were a uniform dark brown color.

Eyes and Lores: The area around the eyes was the same uniform dark brown that was found on the head and neck. The eye was dark. The yellow area at the base of the bill extended back up the face right to the eye, forming a yellowish eye ring above and below the eye. It was very thin and extended from the front "corner" of the eye to about half way back on both the top and bottom.

Lower and Upper Mandibles: The bill was hooked with a black tip. Above the black tip the bill was a grayish/white color. At the base, the bill turned bright yellow which extended back extensively on the face.

Legs and Feet: The legs and feet were bright yellow. No bands were observed. The leggings were a rusty red color.

Upperbody: The upperbody parts were a uniform dark brown that extended down to the rump area. I think the rump was white, but cannot confirm that because I did not make any notations in my written notes on the rump area itself.

Lowerbody: The lowerbody parts were the same uniform dark brown as the rest of the bird.

Retrices: The upper tail was white. There was a large black subterminal band. The band made up approximately 60% of the total tail length. There was a thin white well defined terminal band. The undertail coverts were white.

Wings: The wings had a buteo shape to them. The upper wing was a uniform dark brown with rusty red shoulders. The underwing was a uniform dark brown with the exception of the wing lining. The lining was a rusty red that was duller than the red found on the shoulders on top. It appeared to be slightly mottled with brown.

Vocalization: None heard.

Habitat: The upper third of the canopy of mature Cottonwood trees along the South Platte River. (What? You expected saguaro cactus in the Denver area!)

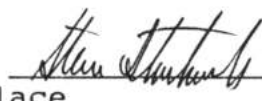
Elimination of Similarly Appearing Species: A "dark phase" Red-tailed Hawk has more white on the body, a much lighter underwing lining, the yellow from the bill does not extend back to the eye, and a more bulky overall appearance. A "rufous morph" Red-tailed Hawk was in the immediate area while the Harris' Hawk was being observed. A "dark phase" Ferruginous would be larger in size, lack the large black subterminal band and the neatly defined narrow white terminal band on the tail. The White-tailed Hawk has white on the face, white that extends from the throat on down through the belly, has whitish leggings and it also has a much narrower subterminal band on the tail. A Common Black-Hawk is black, lacks the rusty red shoulders and the base of the tail is black. A Zone-tailed Hawk is also black, lacks the rusty red shoulders and the base of the tail is black.

Prior Experience with Similarly Appearing Species: I have only observed the Red-tailed Hawk and the Ferruginous Hawk in the wild.

Materials Consulted for this Report: I used the National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America as a reference to make comparisons with similarly appearing species.

This report was written with notes made during and after the observation, and from memory.

Steve Stachowiak
14846 East Caspian Place
Aurora, CO 80014


303/750-3422

12/18/94

Harris' Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*). Report prepared on December 17, 1994, from notes and sketches made in the field on that date before consulting field guides.

Weather: Partly cloudy, with 5-10 mph winds, variable direction. Temperature about 50 degrees F.

Location: Near Waterton Bridge, along the South Platte River, on the border between Jefferson and Douglas Counties, Colorado.

Observer: Joe Roller. Also seen and written up by Joey Kellner, Steve Stachowiak, Joe Himmel, and seen by Glen Meyers, Judy Lane and Carolyn Cooley.

An adult Harris' Hawk was found and identified during the Denver Christmas Bird Count on the morning of December 17, 1994, by Kellner and Stachowiak. After they had seen the bird well, they kindly sought out our party in a nearby segment of the count, and we rushed to refind the bird at about 10 AM (I did not note the exact time). We relocated it within 15 minutes, upstream from Waterton Bridge on the South (Douglas County) side of the river, but the bird was wary and would repeatedly flush and fly 100 to 400 yards away, (downstream to about a mile below that bridge) whenever we got to within about 1-200 yards from it. It always perched on a conspicuous limb of a large cottonwood tree, near the top or outside part, always in the riparian habitat. The bird was silent and was not seen doing any behavior other than perching or flying way. At one time it flew nearly over our heads about 75 yards away. I took about 30 photos with 400 speed black and white film, using a 400 mm lens, and observed it with Zeiss 10x40 binoculars over a 90 minute period.

Later I chanced upon the bird around 3:00 PM 1/4 mile West of Waterton Bridge, on the South side of the S. Platte River, near the place where Kellner and I first refound it. I got my best looks at with a 20-60 zoom Kowa scope, looking North at the bird with the sun low in the West with clear skies. At that time I sketched it at leisure and Joe Himmel viewed it with me for about 45 minutes. (He was able to come down from Greeley after I called him about noon).

General appearance: Overall this was a dark hawk with a typical Buteo shape, a little smaller and definitely less robust or chunky than nearby Red-tailed Hawks, but not as small as I recall Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks look.

Head and neck: Dark brown "fudge-colored" throughout with no markings.

Eye: dark

Upper and lower mandibles: The shape was typical for a buteo, with a dark hooked tip to the upper mandible. The bulk of the bill was bluish gray and the top of the proximal part of the upper mandible (the cere) was bright yellow, as was a yellow line along the lower mandible like a "lip." Between these two yellow areas the mandibles were pale brown or horn-colored, not blue-gray. Overall when the mandibles were viewed

against the bird's dark brown head of body plumage, it appeared noticeably light or yellowish colored.

Legs and feet: Yellow color. Not seen well. When I got my best views through the scope the bird was facing directly away and the legs and feet were obscured by the tail. I did not see any jesses or bands. (Photos show legs and feet better)

Upperparts: Nape, back were uniformly dark brown like the head and wings.

Underparts: Throat, belly, flanks uniformly dark brown, but the undertail coverts were fluffy and white.

Retrices: There was a clean white broad proximal tail-band seen from above when perched and from below in flight. Distal to that was a broad black tail-band that contrasted with the generally brown plumage of the rest of the bird. At the very tip of the tail was a narrow white terminal band. The tail was more narrow than a Red-tail's tail and was square at the end. When the bird was seen perched the primary tips extended only to the middle of black tail band, suggesting that the tail was relatively long.

Wings: The overall wing color dorsally was dark fudge-brown with large, dark rufous or chestnut patches, seen both in flight and when perched. I glimpsed the wing linings once as the bird took flight and the under-wing coverts were rufous, but appeared lighter in tone than the patches on the upper wings.

Comparison to similar species: Other hawks with white bands near the base of the tail, eg Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, lack the rufous wing patches. Ferruginous Hawk, dark morph, would have white commas in the wings. Common Black Hawk has a somewhat similar tail pattern, and overall dark color, but the shape is wrong (tail short and wings very broad) and lacks rufous wing patches. To mention and discount two far-out similar raptors: White-tailed hawk has light underwings and a narrow black tail band. Snail Kite has a superficially similar tail, but overall different shape and bill. None of the dark morph raptors in Hawks (Clark and Wheeler), plate 26 come close.

Previous experience: I've seen Harris' Hawks in Arizona and Texas on several trips over 20 years.

Comments: There is no doubt in my mind as to the identity of the bird. And although Harris' Hawks are kept by falconers, the Waterton bird was very likely wild, based on several features. First of all, it was quite wary, flushing at an equal or greater distance compared to nearby Red-tailed Hawks. No jesses, bands and radio transmitters were seen on the legs. There is a clear pattern of vagrancy to several nearby states and even a breeding record for Meade County in south-west Kansas (Birds in Kansas, Thompson and Ely). Most Kansas records are between December 11 and January 7, so the Waterton bird was present at a likely time.