

Sharp-shinned Hawk
19 Jul 1989
Jackson Township, Hardin Co., IA
Conrads
IBL 60:13, 61:85

Record Number: 89-27
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

David J. Conrads

LETTER

Dave Conrads to Carl Bendorf, 6 December 1990

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:13

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 N-A

NA: Certainly this observer is well qualified to distinguish accipiters. In this case, distinction seems to rest entirely on size and voice difference. Size was not described except for statement "due to its significantly smaller size than a Cooper's Hawk". Likewise, a voice difference is alluded to but the voice of the observed juvenile bird is described only as a "high-pitched descending call". I'm not sure how this descending call relates to the "kek-kek-kek" warning/alarm call (presumably of an adult) used for comparison on the bird song recording.

A-D: A dilemma. A very brief description by one of the state's top accipiter specialists. Dave: it would have been helpful to attempt to quantify size, "the size of a Blue Jay" or something like that. The date and fact that this was an immature bird clearly suggests this was a young-of-the-year and therefore probably nested somewhere in the area, but these facts could also apply to Cooper's. The other sightings of Sharpies in the area were not accompanied by details so we have no way to assess their correctness. Nevertheless, I think I'll go with this one, perhaps for the wrong reasons. We have historical summer records of this species, and one presumed nesting (Iowa Birds), and we have a skilled observer with substantial experience with Cooper's.

A-D: I would conclude these two observations to be immature Sharp-shinned Hawks. Possibly resident, but at these dates most likely late migrants. Size and call the only useable details to separate Cooper's (the much more likely summer resident) from Sharp-shinned Hawk, but I think they are sufficient in the case of a rather common migrant.

A-D: (without comment).

A-D: Good description of a sharpshin and a nice find.

NA: Description is a little puzzling. Most likely alternative is imm. Broad-winged Hawk, much more likely, and supported by call and plumage description, as well as habitat (lack of conifers). However, observer has experience with Cooper's Hawk and noted that tail was long. I believe there is sufficient doubt in this description to vote against acceptance.

REVOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

NA: Again, this observer is well qualified and this identification is probably correct. However, I feel we must be evaluating records individually and based on the permanent

evidence. In this case, the only evidence to evaluate is the written documentation. Because I think (based mainly on the very brief description and the difficulty in describing call notes) that a researcher looking at this documentation in 20 years could have a reasonable doubt, I prefer to vote N-A now as well.

NA: I must change this vote to NA. If one removes observer experience from the equation, the actual description of the bird is too thin to remove reasonable doubt. While observer experience is worth considering, the description must stand on its own merit.

NA: I am changing my vote to N-A. I think this description "thick chocolate streaks down breast to belly", the jumping behavior, and call fit immature Broad-winged Hawk better than immature Sharp-shinned Hawk. The two adults sighted in mid May would be most likely late migrants. I agree that although this bird could be a Sharp-shinned there is sufficient doubt in this case to vote N-A.

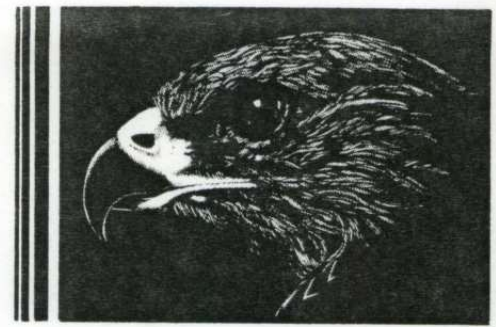
A-D: Points well taken by NA's. The description of the "thick chocolate streaks down the breast and BELLY" draw a conclusion that this was indeed a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Cooper's Hawk normally have the breast rather narrowly and sharply striped with blackish brown on a whitish background. The streaking usually extends farther down onto the belly than on Cooper's. Conrads also states that the calls of this bird were on a significantly higher pitch than other Cooper's he has observed during his research. This is consistent with Sharp-shinned Hawk. He also states that the size of the bird was also significantly smaller than a Cooper's Hawk. This is also consistent with Sharp-shinned Hawk. I do wish that he would have elaborated more on the other two adult Sharp-shinned Hawk sightings that he mentioned. I do not know how these records were corroborated or if they were documented as such (possible nesting birds). With the above I concluded that this was a somewhat summary description but enough to make this sight record that of a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

A-D: I feel that while we all could wish for more size comparison and other details that the details provided by a very knowledgeable raptor enthusiast are adequate for a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The long banded tail should designate this hawk to the accipiters. And "the thick chocolate streaks down the breast and belly" are a field mark for Sharpshins rather than Cooper's Hawks which are more lightly streaked on the belly for immatures. The Hardin Co. Iowa River Greenbelt area is a lovely wooded corridor with some native white pines and red cedars and could be a likely area for this rare nester in Iowa.

NA: Nothing in the A-D comments persuades me to change my vote. Indeed, one A-D voter calls the record "a dilemma". I agree, and believe too much doubt exists to vote A-D.



Macbride Raptor Center



89-27

December 6, 1990

I.O.U. Records Committee
Carl Bendorf, Secretary
845 Cypress Ct.
Iowa City, IA 52245

Dear Records Committee:

Thank you for reviewing my documentation of a hatching year sharp-shinned hawk in Hardin Co. (89-27). I was surprised that my documentation was considered "a dilemma". After reviewing your comments I believe that I will be able to satisfy your questions and that after reevaluation you will accept this documentation.

1. Many wanted a more concrete size description than "significantly smaller than a Cooper's hawk". I had already described that it was an accipiter in the first paragraph and the fact that it was blue-jay sized (which I did not state in the original documentation, unfortunately) led me to determine that it was a "HY Sharp-shinned hawk". I verbally compared it in size to a blue jay to several people prior to submitting the original documentation.

Some of you thought that the bird was probably a Broad-winged hawk. However, if a Broad-winged hawk (a buteo) were to be confused with an accipiter, the closest in size would be a Cooper's hawk and, as I have previously stated, the accipiter observed was too small for a Cooper's.

2. The call of the bird was a food begging call that is similar, but of a higher pitch, than the Cooper's hawk calls I had heard in two years (at that time) of research. The Cooper's hawk food begging call can be heard on the Peterson's Field Guide to Bird Songs. The broad-winged hawk's food begging call is described as a chirping type sound. The hawk observed made a "high pitched descending call". I have not found this type of call described of broad-wings. One stated that the "jumping behavior and call fit immature Broad-winged hawk better than immature Sharp-shinned hawk". I have observed many Cooper's hawks and Broad-winged hawks in Iowa, and have consistently found the accipiters to be extremely nervous and jumpy, and Broad-winged hawks to be rather tame and lethargic. This is inconsistent with the bird described.

3. Another mentioned that there was a lack of habitat (no conifers). This is a false statement. Sharp-shinned hawks will nest in deciduous trees and will adapt to the habitat available. Even so, there is a grove of old red cedar trees on a north facing hillside less than 400 m from the sighting and a small (< 1 acre) of mature mixed conifers 150 m south of the sighting.

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Again I apologize that this record was considered "a dilemma". However, I still feel that my original description stands on its own. Nevertheless, this letter should sufficiently answer your questions. If not, I would be glad to discuss this further. Sharp-shinned hawks nest in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Illinois. They no doubt nest in Iowa, as I've witnessed in Hardin County and it would be unfortunate for the committee to reject this important find. Thanks for reevaluating this report.

Sincerely,

Dave Conrads

Dave Conrads
Director
Macbride Raptor Center

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-27

What species? SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (Accipiter striatus) How many? 1

Location? NE 1/4 of NE 1/4 SEC 13 T-98N R-20W JACKSON TWP HARDIN CO.

Type of Habitat? UPLAND FOREST, STEEP RAVINE

When? date(s): 19 JULY 1989 time: ≈ 1430 to 1431

Who? your name and address: DAVID J. CONRADS DEPT. OF BIOLOGY UNI CEDAR FALLS, IA 50614

Others with you: KEITH FRANZEN, DR. NIXON WILSON

Others before or after you: NONE

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

On 19 JUL 1989, WHILE WORKING ON A SMALL MAMMAL SURVEY PROJECT IN THE IOWA RIVER GREENBELT AREA IN HARDIN COUNTY, KEITH FRANZEN AND I HEARD A BIRD MAKING A HIGH-PITCHED DESCENDING CALL WHICH WE BOTH THOUGHT SOUNDED LIKE A RAPTOR. THE FOREST HAD A HIGH CANOPY AND A DEVELOPED UNDERSTORY AND AT FIRST WE DID NOT SEE THE BIRD. I THEN SAW IT ABOUT 20 FEET AWAY AND AS IT SAW ME (<1 SEC) IT BEGAN JUMPING AROUND IN AND OUT OF VIEW IN THE UPPER BRANCHES OF THE UNDERSTORY. I IMMEDIATELY OBSERVED THAT IT WAS AN ACCIPITER, IT HAD SURPRISINGLY BROAD, BANDED WINGS, THICK CHOCOLATE STREAKS DOWN THE BREAST AND BELLY, AND A LOW BANDED TAIL. IT WAS EXTREMELY "JUMPY" AND WE NEVER OBSERVED IT FOR MORE THAN 1 SECOND SETTING STILL. KEITH ALSO OBSERVED IT AND WE BOTH AGREED THAT IT WAS A SHARP-SHINNED HAWK. IT ~~WAS~~ THEN FLEW THROUGH THE CANOPY AFTER ABOUT 1 MINUTE OR LESS AND WAS NOT SEEN OR HEARD AGAIN. (OVER)

Similar species; how eliminated:

~~DUETO~~ ITS SIGNIFICANTLY SMALLER SIZE THAN A COOPER'S HAWK, WE CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS A HY ♂ SHARP-SHINNED HAWK. WE ALSO LISTENED TO A FIELD GUIDE TO BIRD SONGS AND ALTHOUGH THE SHARP-SHINNED RECORDING WAS THAT OF ITS "KEK-KEK-KEK" WARNING/ALARM CALL, THE COOPER'S HAWK RECORDING WAS THAT OF A FOOD BEGGING CALL WHICH WAS VERY SIMILAR BUT OF A SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER PITCH THAN THAT OF THE BIRD WE OBSERVED. ~~COOPER'S HAWK~~

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

THE VIEWING CONDITIONS WERE FAIR, THE FOREST WAS QUITE SHADED. WE DID NOT HAVE ANY OPTICAL EQUIPMENT BUT OBSERVED THE BIRD FROM 20'-35' WITHOUT AID.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

I HAVE RESEARCHED THE COOPER'S HAWK FOR TWO YEARS IN THE STATE AND HAVE HAD EXTENSIVELY OBSERVED NESTS AND NESTLINGS. I HAVE ALSO WORKED FOR TWO YEARS TRAPPING + OBSERVING MIGRATING RAPTORS.

References and persons consulted before writing description: W.S. CLARK, B.K. WHEELER: HAWKS, 1987; P. DUANE, et. al.: HAWKS IN FLIGHT, 1988; D.W. STOKES: A GUIDE TO BIRD BEHAVIOR, 1989; J.J. DUNSMORE, et. al.: IOWA BIRDS, 1964; J. STRAVERS.

How long before field notes made? 3 HRS this form completed? 6 DAYS

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SINGLE ADULT SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS WERE OBSERVED WITHIN ONE MILE OF THIS REPORTED SIGHTING IN MAY. BIRDS OBSERVED AT THIS TIME ARE USUALLY NESTING BIRDS SINCE TERRITORIES ARE MARKED OUT IN MARCH + EARLY APRIL (AT LEAST FOR COOPER'S HAWKS); THEREFORE I AM NOT SURPRISED THAT THESE SECRETIVE HAWKS ARE NESTING IN THE STATE.

THESE ARE THE DATES + LOCATIONS OF THE 2 SIGHTINGS:

5 MAY: LEVERTON TIMBER AREA (HARDIN CO.)

SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SEC 7 T-88N R-19W-

SINGLE ADULT

18 MAY: PRIVATE WOODLAND (E. BEAR)

SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SEC 11 T-88N R-20W

SINGLE ADULT