

Swainson's Hawk

Record Number: 91-40

14 Dec 1991

Classification: NA

1 mi. n. of Stone Park on route 12, Plymouth Co., IA

\*Randall D. Williams

IBL 62: 39, 54, 71

DOCUMENTATION: Randall D. Williams

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: 62:54

Christmas Bird Count: 62:39

Records Committee: IBl 62:71

VOTE: 7 NA

NA, At this time I vote to not accept. Such a late date makes me search this document rather closely. Swainson's Hawks are mostly insect eaters and at that date one would be hard pressed to find food. As per document it does suggest Swainson's, however some details which I look for are missing. One mark I need, the banded tail is missing. The clear white throat, small beak are not described. Most Swainson's do carry a patagal mark. Some immature Red-tailed Hawks carry a hood around the neck and head. After review by other committee members I could accept this bird if majority agree.

NA, Several characteristics described such as bib-like brown band are suggestive of Swainson's Hawk but most striking field mark -- the dark flight feathers contrasting with light underwing linings was not mentioned. There was also no description of the size and shape of the wings.

NA, The presence of a Swainson's Hawk in Iowa in mid-December would be an extraordinary event -- this should be in S. Am., or at the closest, southern Florida or Texas. This well-written documentation seems to key on three field marks -- the white, unbanded belly, the absence of patagial marks, and the "bib". I have seen numerous Red-tails (presumably Krider's) with no belly band. This form can also lack the patagial marks (IBL, 56:4 article by Wilson). The full bib also occurs on Red-tails, and has caused me numerous double takes in areas where Swainson's would not be expected. An excellent photo of this is on page 144 (photo 25c) of Peterson Hawks guide, although this photo shows a distinct patagial bar. Red-tail is a highly variable species, and extreme caution is needed when dealing with it and similar species.

NA, I am voting NA because I see several descriptive discrepancies that make me uncertain of this ID. 1) "Dark-band around throat" should be around breast in Swainson's. 2) "tail not red" should be narrowly barred in Swainson's. 3) "Similar in size to Red-tailed Hawk" should be slightly smaller. The lack of a patagial patch and carpal patch are strongly supportive of Swainson's Hawk, however the unrepresented late date makes it necessary that all details collaborate this sighting.

NA, Date, location (over loess hills), flight (hovering, dihedral), and perch (top of tree) typical of Rough-legged Hawk. Bib and light belly OK for light male Rough-leg. I'm not sure what the observer means by "axillary area" and "feathered edge of

underwing." Clark describes underwing of the light morph adult male Rough-leg as "heavily spotted white coverts, black carpal patch with much white mottling, some barring on secondaries and inner primaries, and dark trailing edge." Clark describes under wing of adult Swainson's Hawk as "two-toned; white coverts contrast with dark gray flight feathers" and immature as "two-toned; but less contrast than adults." The only description of the tail was "not red", which fits any buteo, including Red-tailed Hawk. The plumage of Rough-legged Hawk is quite variable, with sex and age differences. I think this was a Rough-legged Hawk, rather than the extremely unlikely Swainson's Hawk. The underwing pattern of Swainson's would have been much more obvious than what is described.

NA, The only field mark that gives this record a chance of being an acceptable record of Swainson's Hawk is the fact that the bird lacked the patagial marks. All of the other field marks that were documented are not diagnostic for this species. I have seen Red-tailed Hawks with these marks as mentioned. For the records committee to accept a record of this species on a date such as this there must be a complete description of the plumage and as much of the behavioral characteristics as possible that is diagnostic for the individual or individuals in question. Other marks that would have helped this record: What was the color or color pattern of the entire surface of the underwing, shape of wings, length of tail (comparatively), tail color, tail barring (yes or no?), throat color, head color, back color, feet color and comparative size, were there carpal marks at all? Everything in the documentation except the lack of patagial marks is consistent with some of the Red-tailed Hawks that I have seen.

NA, A Swainson's Hawk report in December is an unlikely report, however there was a good report in American Birds of a Swainson's Hawk in December or so about one year ago in another region (Great Plains area). In this Iowa report key Swainson's Hawk details were not observed. The 2-toned wing effect of white wing linings contrasting with the dark flight feathers should be very apparent. Swainson's have long, narrow, pointed wings, which are different from the bulging wings of a Red-tailed Hawk. I wish the markings on the tail could have been observed well. Swainson's have a definite terminal tail band on the underside of the tail. I think it is possible this bird could have been an immature Red-tailed Hawk. Immatures and adults have different wing and tail proportions sometimes. I have seen Red-tails with a bib-like look. Red-tails sometimes soar in a slight V-shaped and are not always flat. A Swainson's Hawk often has a very prominent dihedral. Red-tails are highly variable in coloration. William Clark and Brain Wheeler's Hawks book states of a Krider's (Redtail) adult (and Krider's immatures are similar) that "dark patagial marks on underwing are reduced or absent." I have enough doubts that I must vote NA. Please continue to make observations and documentations and include as many details as possible.

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

91-40

What species? Swainson's Hawk How many? 1

Location? 1 mile north of the west entrance to Stone State Park on highway 12

Type of Habitat? hovering above loess bluff; overlooking Big Sioux River floodplain.

When? date(s): 14 December 1991 time: 2:00pm to 2:30pm.

Who? your name and address: Randall D. Williams 6105 Pine View Drive Sioux City, IA 51106

Others with you: Mike Franken

Others before or after you: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

Bright, clean breast creamy-white color. Patagial patches NOT present. Dark brown band around throat <sup>similar to bill in</sup> ~~with a good~~ appearance. Axillary area of underwing brighter than feathered edge of underwing. Carpal wing patches NOT present. Tail NOT red.  
when seen soaring, wings were held in a slight V shape,  
similar in size to Red-tailed Hawk

The bird was hovering above the bluff using a stiff (20 mph) northwest wind. ~~It~~ We closely observed for about 15 seconds before it veered off to perch on a tree on top of the bluff. We approached using our vehicle. The bird took off and soared above us before moving off to the west and south. Approximately 100 yards farther down the road we spotted a Red-tailed Hawk hovering above a bluff in the wind. We could contrast the two species easily.

Similar species; how eliminated: Red-tailed Hawk: wings held flat when soaring; presence of red tail patagial patches present. No hib

Rough-legged Hawk: dark belly-band on girdle. Carpal wing patches present. Dark band on trailing edge of wing (immature)

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
Bright, strong light. Closest approach of about 30 yards while slowly soaring above us.  
Tower 8x40 Binoculars Best distance estimate based on experience.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Swainson's seen back home at Hot Springs, SD. and while on vacation in Wyoming & traveling through western Nebraska and Colorado.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Peterson Field Guide to Hawks. Williams, Clark  
Brian K Wheeler. 1987. Houghton Mifflin Company. Bill Huser  
A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies. Roger Tory Peterson. 4 Ed. 1980. Houghton Mifflin Company, Jerry Probst  
How long before field notes made? \* this form completed? 12.16.91 Mike Franken.

\* Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but at the time I was not aware that I would have to document the  
Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life). observations.

National Wildlife Federation Field Report Form  
American Raptors. William F. Clark's Wildlife Ranch Station. 1983  
National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America. 1 Ed. 1983. Study L. Sentered.