

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Swainson's Hawk How Many? one

Location: Just east & south of Round Pond in Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Johnson Co.

Type of habitat?: Over trees lining a grassy field on south side of Swan Lake Road.

When? Date(s): Sat., April 4, 1992 time: 9:00 am to 9:02 am

Who? your name and address:

James Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, IA 52240-9148

Others with you: Sharon Scheib

Others before or after you: None known

*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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.*

A large hawk floating over trees next to a grassy field; I assumed a Red-tailed Hawk until I put my binoculars on it and saw that it lacked the patagial marks of a RTH and had a dark mottled pattern underneath including the breast, thus really getting my attention. I next assumed a Rough-legged Hawk and looked to the wing pattern, but the wrist markings were dark commas, not the large carpal patch in a RLH. My next thought was a Swainson's Hawk, but I could only recall the underside of an adult with the darker flight feathers clearly standing out from the lighter interior portions of the wing. This pattern did not stand out as an obvious characteristic despite my knowing to look for it. There was a light "window" outside (exterior to) the dark comma on the underside of the wings. When the bird turned away the upper wing pattern was clear. With light from behind me I saw plainly the chocolate brown above outlined by the black flight feathers, as I have only seen in Swainson's Hawks. I had the National Geographic Society Field Guide with me, but being familiar with its contents on raptors, I preferred not to confuse my image with drawings I did not think would help. I waited until I returned home to consult Dunne's Hawks in Flight and identified figures C on p.38 and A on p.39 as best representing the features I had seen. Given that the upper side of the wings and back were correct for the adult, the bird must have been an adult with "...heavily barred rusty on entire underside..." as described by Dunne on p.38.

*Similar species and how eliminated:* See above for RTH & RLH. From the first I never considered it to be a Red-shoulder Hawk because of the highly contrasting patterning of the underside as opposed to the duller, finer underside of the RSH. The size was also that of a larger hawk.

*Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification?*

My wife was busy looking at a bluebird and did not see the hawk.

*If yes, explain:*

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

Sunny with light at my back, 75 yards closing to less than 50 yards (I revisited the site the next day to try to relocate the bird and to describe the location for this report.) 7X35 Nikon binoculars.

*Previous experience with species and similar ones:* I have seen Swainson's Hawks in Iowa each of the last three years and studied 35 landing in one field this past September in Kansas. Have seen many RLH and RTH over the years.

*References and persons consulted before writing description:*

Dunne's Hawks in Flight; Jim Fuller encouraged me to document this as an early sighting.

*How long before field notes made? this form completed?* One day.

MAIL TO; T.H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240