

Ferruginous Hawk
2 Jan 1989
Red Rock Res., Marion Co., IA
*Ann Johnson
IBL 59:51, 61:85

Record Number: 89-04
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Ann Johnson

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:51
Records Committee: IBL 61:85

VOTE: 3 A-D, 4 NA

A-D. Behavior, size, long wings, white undersides without patagial mark, and tail band seem pretty good for this species.

NA. While the description is certainly suggestive of an immature Ferruginous, I do not feel this report is beyond doubt. My greatest concern is with the "after the fact" identification, based upon perusing through field guides. From personal experience, I am aware of the hazards of this. Several of the field marks noted were subjective--long wings and large size. Without substantial experience or side-by-side comparison, I'm not sure these observations are that helpful. While the "white tail" with "wide, gray band at the end" are suggestive, the observer correctly points out that this is shared by many Red-tails. The absence of a patagial mark is also helpful, but based upon documentation, this appears to be another after-the-fact conclusion. A more complete description of the habitat might have been helpful, although probably not enough to carry this one.

NA. I believe this bird was most likely a Krider's Redtail. However, I am not certain whether a Krider's would show a Patagial patch or not. Although I can't rule out the possibility of Ferruginous more collaborating characteristics are required on this rare Iowa hawk. I also have a lot of problem accepting after the fact identifications.

NA. Description could be of imm. Ferruginous, but I need more thorough description of the upperwing pattern, head color, bill size, position of the wings in flight, and behavior of bird. The I.D. of this bird apparently rests mainly on the tail pattern. Unfortunately, Red-tails are extremely variable in plumage and I cannot conclude that the bird wasn't a Red-tail.

NA. Although the field marks seem to fit an immature Ferruginous Hawk to some degree, I don't get anything solid for that identification. Failure to see a very obvious mark (white at base of primaries on upperwing) and finding a very difficult mark (no patagial markings) is disconcerting. Long-wings is subjective. Many redtails have all white underparts and white base to tail.

A-D. Description looks good for immature Ferruginous. With the white under wing and complete lack of dark patagial mark, gray band at end of tail pretty much eliminates other species. Description of upper surface of wings would have helped but I think the description is adequate for Ferruginous.

A-D. There is nothing in this description to count against ID. Definitely in favor, however, and to my mind clinching the ID are three points: 1) "siting on the crest of the hill"--common behavior for Ferruginous. 2) "very slight wrist comma"--a key field mark, tends to eliminate Rough-leg. 3) The tail pattern. Very similar to light-phase Rough-leg, and characteristic of immature Ferruginous.

SENT TO: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211 [5/31/89]

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-04

Species: Ferruginous Hawk - Immature

Location: Lake Red Rock, Marion Co, IA

Habitat: pasture with wooded draw to the south

Date(s): 1/2/89

Time: 9:00 am to 9:01 am (est.)

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Ave., Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: 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, under-tail, legs, feet). Also mention behavior and voice.

While driving along a rock road near the White Breast area, I observed a crow and a "large, light brown buteo" sitting on the crest of the hill in the pasture. I assumed it was a large redtail, as they had been active all morning, but did stop the car to take a look with binoculars. As I stopped, the bird began to fly and "long wings" were notable. As it headed toward me it exposed nearly all-white underparts. The only distinctive black markings underneath were the "tips of the primaries, a very slight wrist comma, and a few scattered black spots" elsewhere. There were not enough spots to create any distinctive patterns and at this point I still believed I was looking at a pale redtail, although the thought went through my mind how "incredibly white" this huge bird was underneath. By now the bird was banking and the body was pretty much "uniformly light to medium brown." There was nothing particularly distinctive that caught my eye until it completely turned, revealing a "white tail" with a "wide, gray band at the end." I can't in all honesty describe the upperwings as the tail was so distinctive that my attention was focused at that point. The dark mark on the flanks of the immature ferruginous may have been present, but my only recollection for notes was "a few scattered black spots" on the underneath.

I was a bit confused, wondering if I had blown identifying a rough-leg. The bird flew over the crest of the hill and disappeared, evidently going behind the draw as I was unable to find it again at the time and later in the day.

Similar species and how eliminated:

This was a classic case of delayed reaction as I began sorting through in my mind as I drove down the road. The large size and bulk of the bird, plus the broad, rounded tail made it an obvious buteo. After double-checking all phases of the rough-legged hawk in Clark's Hawks, I once again eliminated rough-leg because of the nearly all white underparts. However, redtail wasn't fitting either, even a light phase, and a few miles down the road the ferruginous crossed my mind. I pulled off the road, made a few notes, and began researching with the guides at hand. The most troublesome field mark was the "white tail with gray band." I have seen numerous redtails give the white rump appearance but none have had the distinctive white tail/gray terminal band. There was absolutely no dark pataqial marking on the underwing. The combination of field marks (or lack thereof) would seem to approach an immature Krider's redtail. I eliminated this bird because of the appearance of one, wide gray tail band and the more uniform coloring of the body - very little white mottling. Although I wish I'd had a longer look, I came to the conclusion that the combination of what I had observed pointed toward an immature ferruginous hawk.

anyone disagree or have reservations about identification?

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IV.

If yes, explain:

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

Sunny day with sun at back and to the left. Observed at an estimated 200', judging from electric poles, through 7x26 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Several ferruginous hawks seen over the years on trips west, although these have been primarily adults. Last immature seen in Colorado, summer of '87.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

None prior to field notes; National Geographic Field Guide, Audubon Master Guide, other field guides, Clark's Hawks, Conner's The Complete Birder, and Barb Wilson's "Identification of Ferruginous Hawks", Iowa Bird Life 56:100 were all consulted prior to completion of this form.

How long before field notes made? immediately How long before this form completed? 5 days