

Ferruginous Hawk
29 Sep 1985
Story Co., IA
*S. Dinsmore, *Fred J. Alsop
IBL 56:44, Wilson 1958

Record Number: 85-16
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Steve Dinsmore
Fred J. Alsop

LETTER

Bruce Peterjohn to Tom Kent, 23 Dec 1985, p 3

REFERENCE

Records Committee: IBL 56:44
Wilson, B. L. 1988. Records of Ferruginous Hawk in Iowa. IBL
58:95-100.

VOTE: 6-III, 1-V

V, Although most of the findings seem to fit Ferruginous Hawk, I am disturbed about the following: 1. The tail is that of an adult, the legs that of an immature. 2. The only features of the upper surface of the bird that are described are the tail and wing patch. Was the rest of wing and back dark or light, brown or rust, flecked with white or not? 3. A light-headed immature should have an eyeline. 4. Beth Proescholdt reported a Krider's Hawk from the same location that day.

III, Very difficult ID. The position of the dorsal wing patches, possible feathered tarsi, direct comparison with Red-tails, and the one observer's personal experience with Ferruginous Hawks convinced me this was more than just another light-colored red-tail.

III, No reservations: Rusty color on back; rectangular windows in primary base; pure white belly and light head are good imm. Ferruginous marks.

III, Good descriptions. Experience of Fred Alsop a key factor here, as is absence of black bar on leading edge of underwing. Location of wing patches suggestive of Ferruginous.

III, Red tail tip is supposed to be on adult and white legs on young bird. I don't think we could ask for a better set of documentations.

REVOTE: 4-III, 1-IV, 2-V

V, The inconsistency between tail and legs needs to be resolved by another expert before I can accept this record. Also, we could ask for description of Krider's Hawk seen by Beth Proescholdt.

IV, Light colored Krider's type not completely eliminated, several marks as listed by both observers don't "fit." At least one or two observers on the same day and the few days following could only find a very light Krider's in the same location. With Dinsmore finding same bird 4 and 8 days later, I would think someone else would have documented the bird as back up since others were looking for it.

III, Placement and shape of dorsal wing patch, white belly, absence of patagial bar, rusty back, flight characteristics, direct comparison with red-tails, and one observer's experience

with the species convinces me this was an imm. Ferruginous.

III, I am of the opinion that this bird was an immature, possible 1 1/2 years old, at which time it could have some red in tail and pale legs. The absence of the dark bar at the inner forewing is a key ID characteristic.

III, If the bird looks like Steve says it did, it seems to be a Ferruginous, though tail and legs suggest different ages. I've written Bill Clark asking if Ferruginous can have this combination but for now I'm sticking with III.

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RR1, Box 41, Hastings, IA 51540

RECORDS OF FERRUGINOUS HAWK IN IOWA

BARBARA L. WILSON

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) is a large buteo of the western grasslands and mountains. Its normal range is just to the west of Iowa. Although it is listed as Casual for Iowa on the most recent official list of Iowa birds (I. O. U. Records Committee 1986), the status of Ferruginous Hawk in Iowa is in doubt because identification problems, which I discussed in a previous article (Wilson 1986), make evaluation of past records difficult. Here I attempt to sort out what little is known with certainty and what may be reasonably surmised from published records and documentations of Ferruginous Hawk in Iowa through 1987.

For reports of Ferruginous Hawk I relied heavily on copies of published records and documentations on file with the Records Committee and a summary of those reports prepared by Tom Kent. Follow-up information was obtained on several reports. Copies of all but the most recent documentations and those published records that contained any descriptive detail were evaluated by William S. Clark, coauthor of *A Field Guide to Hawks North America* (Clark and Wheeler 1987). Reports since 1980 have been evaluated by the Records Committee. Conclusions in this article, however, are my own and may differ from those of Clark and/or the Records Committee.

Of the 45 records of Ferruginous Hawk (table), few can be considered correct with a high degree of certainty. Of eight records based on dead birds, only one specimen remains, an immature bird from Iowa County dated 21 August 1936 now at the University of Iowa (photos). Another positively identified bird was a banded immature found dead 3 miles north of Pocahontas on 27 October 1977. The bird was banded as a nestling near Medina, North Dakota, on 27 June 1977 (Gilmer et al. 1985, Gilmer letter to James Dinsmore). No specimens or useful descriptions are available for the other dead birds.

Three sight records describing adult birds mention the reddish mantle or for other reasons seem to be correct (31 December 1954, Grundy Co.; 28 October 1973 and 26 October 1983, Page Co.). I consider 34 of the 37 sight records unacceptable. Sixteen of these lack any descriptive detail and the remaining 18 have varying amounts of description that seems insufficient for identification or inconsistent with Ferruginous Hawk. Some of these descriptions are very suggestive and perhaps correct, but not completely convincing. In fact, as shown in the table, Clark and the I. O. U. Records Committee have sometimes disagreed on how to interpret these documentations.

It is interesting to note that the accepted sight records are of adults, but the two tangible records are of immatures. I would expect that the majority of Ferruginous Hawks in Iowa would be immatures, since first-year birds fledged in North Dakota have been noted to wander during migration and in their first summer (Gilmer et al. 1985). Unfortunately, immature Ferruginous Hawks are difficult to describe in a way that is both honest and convincing. Therefore, I believe that some of the recently documented immatures may have been Ferruginous Hawks even though the records can not be considered to be beyond doubt.

Ferruginous Hawk Records for Iowa Through 1987

Date	County	Reference	Comment
25 Jun 1901	Black Hawk	DuMont 1933	specimen lost?
before 1907	Linn	Anderson 1907	detail, Clark-
4 Nov 1914	Wapello	Spiker 1924	dead bird, no detail
17 Sep 1917	Woodbury	Stephens 1918	mounted, no detail
2 Apr 1919	Keokuk	DuMont 1933	2, no detail
7 Dec 1919	Story	Stoner 1920	specimen, no detail
3 Oct 1921	Woodbury	Stephens 1930	mounted dark female
23 Nov 1921	Plymouth	Stephens 1930	mounted female
28 Mar 1923	Keokuk	DuMont 1933	2, no detail
17 Mar 1926	Buchanan	Pierce 1930	no detail
6 Jun 1929	Polk	DuMont 1929	2, detail, Clark-
13 Apr 1930	Buchanan	Pierce 1930	no detail
29 Mar 1934	Dallas-Ferry	DuMont 1934	2, detail, Clark-
9 Apr 1934	Dickinson	DuMont 1934	2, no detail
17 Apr 1934	Emmet	DuMont 1934	detail, Clark-
20 Mar 1936	Woodbury	Siles 1946	no detail
27 Aug 1936	Iowa	Univ. IA specimen 29674	See photos
2 Jan 1939	Johnson	Johnson 1939	3, detail, Clark-
13 May 1946	Dickinson/Emmet	Musgrove et al. 1947	no detail
8 Sep 1946	Polk	Siles 1946	no detail
1 Oct 1951	Freemont	Brown 1971	no detail
31 Dec 1954	Grundy	IBL 25:10	detail, Clark+
3 Nov 1962	Adair	Petersen 1962	detail, Clark-
1963	Marshall	IBL 34:10	no detail
26 Dec 1966	Bremers	IBL 37:6	no detail
26 Dec 1966	Bremers	IBL 34:20	no detail
26 Dec 1970	Page	IBL 41:13	detail, Clark-
17 Dec 1972	Story	IBL 43:4	no detail
28 Oct 1973	Page	IBL 43:104	7, detail, Clark+
28 Dec 1974	Bremers	IBL 45:8	no detail
Feb 1977	Lucas	Roosa and Bartlett 1977	no detail
27 Oct 1977	Pocahontas	Gilmer et al. 1985	road kill, banded
27 Oct 1977	Harrison	doc, IBL 47:144	no detail, Clark-
Feb 1978	Harrison	IBL 48:70	detail, Clark-
3,7 Feb 1979	Johnson/Iowa	doc (2), IBL 49:24	Clark-
26 Dec 1980	Freemont	RC(80-27), Clark-	no detail
26 Oct 1983	Page	RC(83-31)+, Clark+	no detail
22 Sep 1984	Marshall	RC(84-24)+, Clark-	no detail
23 Oct 1984	Pocahontas	doc, IBL 55:58	no detail
25 Dec 1984	Tama	doc, IBL 55:58	no detail
28 Mar 1985	Cherokee	RC(85-03)-	no detail
29 Sep 1985	Story	RC(85-16)-, Clark+	no detail
1 Feb 1986	Appanoose	doc, IBL 57:78	RC(86-06)-

IBL citations are for Field Reports, Christmas Bird Counts, Bird Banding Summaries, and Records Committee Reports in Iowa Bird Life; doc = documentation on file with Records Committee; no detail = no description of the bird; RC() = Records Committee (record number); Clark = William S. Clark; + = accepted record; - = record not accepted.

Reports since 1970 were all from fall and winter (September through February). Most were from October (5), December (5), and February (4), months when this species is expected. Of course, other hawks, including Kridler's Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis kridleri*), also migrate through and winter in Iowa during these months and may be confused with Ferruginous Hawk.

The older records are not as confined seasonally. The records of dead birds are from each of the months August through December and from June. Sight records include about as many spring records as fall-winter records, and a few observations are from summer.

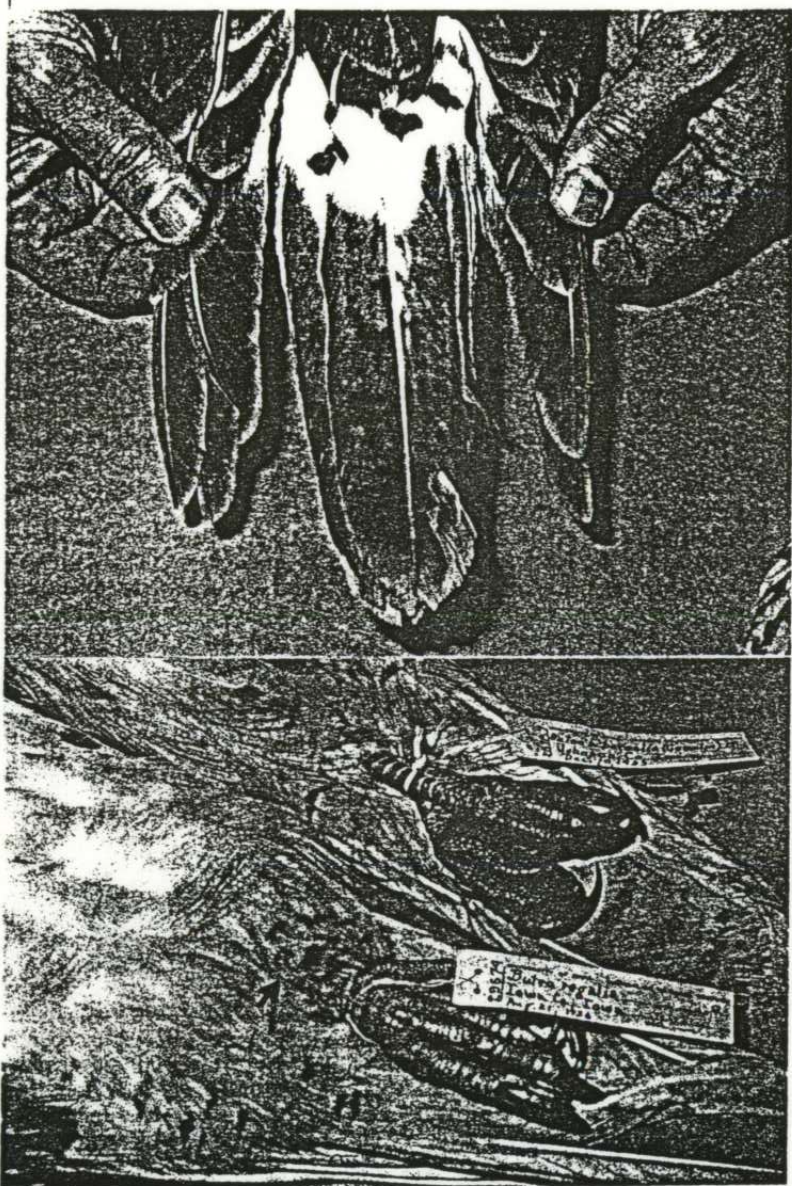
One might dismiss the breeding season reports as identification errors; indeed, the scraps of description available reveal a lack of knowledge needed to identify Ferruginous Hawk in the field. Nevertheless, two summer reports are hard to ignore, since they are based on specimens. Ferruginous Hawk is almost as easy to identify in the hand as it is difficult to identify in the field. Feathered tarsi are easy to recognize in the hand (photo) and exclude all other species except Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), a species that is even less likely in summer in Iowa. The August bird is now the specimen at the University of Iowa. DuMont (1933) lists a specimen collected on 25 June 1901 from Cedar Falls and said to be at Iowa State Teachers College (now University of Northern Iowa). An old specimen now at that University lacks any data on date or place of collection (letter from Dave Conrads to the author), but may be the same bird.

The range of Ferruginous Hawk has been declining, but it still breeds locally in central and rarely in eastern South Dakota (Whitney et al. 1978). Possibly when the species was more common on the eastern edge of its range, individuals wandered into the Iowa in summer.

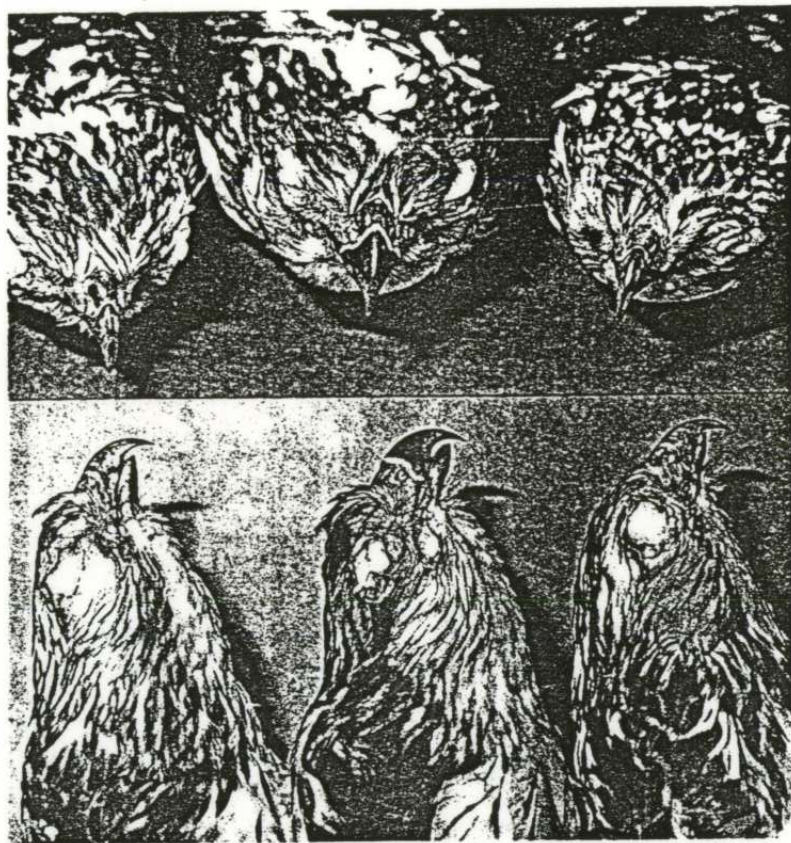
The status of Ferruginous Hawk in other nearby states confirms that Iowa is on the edge of the species range. The hawk is not known to breed in Minnesota, but is a regular, rare migrant in spring and fall, especially in western part of the state near its Dakota breeding range, and spring sightings are about twice as common as fall sightings there (Janssen 1987). The species breeds rarely in western Nebraska and it regularly winters there as well. Schmitz and Fyfe (1987) consider its winter range to include northern Mexico and all of the western United States south and west of the northeast corner of Nebraska, although birders resident in eastern Nebraska consider it most unusual in the eastern one-third of the state (T. Bray and B. Padelford, personal communication).

Few Ferruginous Hawks are reported east of Iowa, and probably not all are accurate. A highly respected Illinois observer considers his own reports invalid and indicates that others are open to question (Bohlen 1986), so we are not the only state that has a problem determining the frequency of this species.

At least five records of Ferruginous Hawk in Iowa appear to be substantial, and some of the others were likely correctly identified as well, but are not adequately described. Three of the five acceptable records are from the last ten years, barely enough to consider the species Casual. Iowa is just east of the known regular range of this species, so one would expect it to occur as a rare but regular migrant and perhaps winter visitor, especially in western Iowa. More information is now available in field guides on hawk identification, especially of immature birds. Careful observation and recording of details seen (and photographs!) should yield more Ferruginous Hawk records for Iowa.



Immature Ferruginous Hawk, Iowa Co., 21 Aug 1936. Top: banded gray tail is beginning to turn red near the white basal area. Note large black spots on white greater upper tail coverts. Bottom: feathered tarsi with dark spots (arrow) compared to Red-tailed Hawk above with unfeathered tarsi. Photos by T. H. Kent.



Ferruginous Hawk flanked by two Red-tailed Hawks. Compared to the Red-tailed, the Ferruginous has a large head and beak, wide gape (mouth), light cheek without malar line, and dark eye line. University of Iowa specimens. Photos by T. H. Kent.

Tom Kent
23 Dec. 1985
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Arctic Loon--unacceptable. The observer failed to mention any of the distinctive plumage characteristics. His description did not eliminate a small Common Loon.

Ferruginous Hawk--unacceptable; undoubtedly a Red-tailed Hawk. Both observers described the tail as bicolored with a white base and broad reddish terminal band. This tail pattern indicated the bird was an adult hawk. Both observers mentioned the underparts were entirely white, which eliminates an adult Ferruginous Hawk which would have noticeably reddish legs.

Prairie Falcon--unacceptable. Their descriptions of the head pattern are ambiguous and contradictory while the other important field marks (black axillars, wing shape differences, ...) were not noted. Hence, I don't feel confident that Peregrine Falcon was satisfactorily eliminated. The observers may not be aware that young tundra Peregrines have light brown crowns which contrast with the darker "moustache mark". (Dinsmore described the crown as lighter than the back which sounds suspiciously like a young Peregrine; Prairies should not have a contrasting crown.) To answer your question, it is very possible for experienced observers to correctly identify Prairie Falcons without viewing the axillars. Unfortunately, my impression is that most Iowa observers lack considerable experience with large falcons so that observing black axillars may have to be required in most cases (except possible for wintering birds which are much more likely to be Prairies).

Trumpeter/Tundra Swan (4/8/85--Clay Co.)--the photographed bird is definitely a young Mute Swan, based on plumage characteristics and bill color.

Concerning your fall report, I noticed 2 errors. Sage Thrasher was left out of the "Species Data" section and the peak dates for Solitary Vireo should be September, not August. I was also dismayed by the poor quality of documentation produced by Steve Dinsmore. They were generally very sloppy with incomplete details and mostly unacceptable. Most of his sightings would not have been included at all if they were not observed (and properly documented) by others. I would suggest that somebody in your Records Committee provide him with examples of good documentations and explain to him the importance of providing thorough details for all noteworthy observations. While you are familiar with Steve's abilities, I know his poor descriptions will not impress any knowledgeable observer who does not know him.

This letter has gotten too long. I'm about to enter the computer era which should be a great convenience for all of my writing. Hope I've satisfactorily answered your questions. Let me know if I can provide any other assistance. Best wishes for this holiday season.

Sincerely,


Bruce Peterjohn

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Ferruginous Hawk How many? 1 (probably a young bird based on the lack of leg color.)

Location? Tiags Marsh, Story County

Type of habitat? in open cropland near a small marsh

When? date(s): 29 Sept. 1985 and 3, 7 Oct 1985 time: 9:30 AM to 9:35 AM and 10:10 AM to 10:15 AM (estimated)

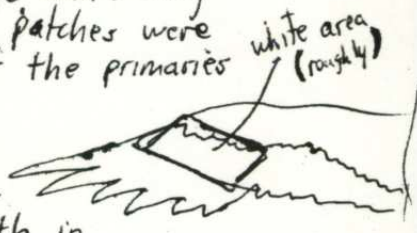
Who? your name and address: Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames IA 50010

others with you: George Brown, Ames and Fred Alsep, Tennessee

others before or after you: Paul Martsching, Ames

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.

The bird was first sighted perching on top of a telephone pole. The large size, pure white underparts and white head made the bird look different. After a few minutes, the bird took off and flew about a half a mile away to land on another telephone pole. In flight, the long wings held in a dihedral, the white tail with a dark, rufous tinged terminal band 2-3 inches wide, and large white wing patches on the upper wing were clearly seen. The white wing patches were roughly rectangular in shape and were positioned at the base of the primaries near the wingtips. (See sketch) We were not able to relocate the bird until about 30 minutes later when we saw it flying back to the place where we had originally found it. We observed the bird in fairly good light at distances as close as 40-50 ft., both in flight and perched. We were able to see the legs extremely well, and saw that they were totally white and lacked any rufous coloring, which is a good fieldmark on young Ferruginous Hawks. We again that the bird held its wings in a dihedral and hovered several times, something Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks do more than Red-tails. We also had the opportunity to observe the bird in direct comparison with 2-3 Red-tailed Hawks. The bird was definitely larger and longer-winged and had white wing patches on the primaries rather than in the middle of the wing like two of the young Red-tails nearby. Fred Alsep, a visiting birder from Tennessee who is familiar with the species, agreed on our identification based on size, wing patch position, and light coloring.



Similar species and how eliminated:

Red-tailed Hawk eliminated by lack of dark bar on leading edge of underwing, position of white wing patches, white tail with rusty tip, lack of belly band, and rust color on back and wings.
Rough-legged Hawk eliminated by lack of wrist marks, rust color on back and wings, all-white legs, unbanding tail, and lack of belly band.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? Yes.

If yes, explain: Other people wondered if the bird was a Red-tailed Hawk

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

Light was good, even though it was overcast and raining lightly. Estimated viewing distance was as close as 40-50 ft. I used a BTL 20x Spotting scope and Nikon 8x23 Binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

References and persons consulted before writing description:

How long before field notes made? immediately this form completed? 8 hours

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

Since the initial observations, I relocated the bird at the same location on 3, 7 Oct. I was able to note the following marks:

Beak - seen well when bird was perched on telephone Pole - appeared massive, even at a distance - dark colored.

Legs - when perched, feathers came down to almost cover feet, but I am not sure if this was due to the way it perched, or if the tarsi were fully feathered.

Underwing - there were absolutely no marks on the surface of the underwing - no wristmark or dark bar on leading edge of the underwing - underwing was white colored.

Tail - upon closer observation, tail appeared mostly white, except for a faint rusty tip.

Back and upperwing surface - closer observation revealed some rust color in these locations, especially on the back.

DOCUMENTATION FORM for extraordinary bird sightings in Iowa

What species? Ferruginous (Rough-legged) Hawk How many? 1

Location? (Steve, you'll have to supply this) Teigs Marsh, Story County

Type of habitat? Farm land, open tilled/untilled fields and grassland

When? date(s): Sunday, 29 September '85 time: 10:15 CDT to (?)

Who? your name and address: DR FRED J. ALSOP, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES DEPT, ETSU, JOHNSON CITY IA, 52601

others with you: Steve Dinsmore & Dr George Brown

others before or after you: None I am aware of

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. Bird first observed perched on cross arm of utility pole at approx. 2/10 mile distance. Rufous type Hawk w/ extremely whitish head and underparts very noticeable. Bird flew after we exited auto and in flight large white wrist patches very noticeable on upper surface of wing. White rump and upper tail also distinctive. In flight hawk appeared larger than Red-tail with slower wing beats, and was both longer winged and longer tailed. Bird perched on utility wire after crossing fields about 300 yds from first observation site and after leaving flew this distance at a right angle to us. We followed in the auto but were unable to relocate the Hawk. Approximately 20 minutes later we located this same hawk in flight near the original spot of discovery. The bird was flying toward us and there were at least two adult Red-tailed hawks in the same location allowing comparisons of size and field marks. Again easily noted were the white head and underparts, white wrist marks and white rump & upper tail. Distal third of upper tail appeared rusty colored and some rufous/rust noted in upper wings on secondary coverts. The hawk was seen to hover into a moderate (5-8 mph) wind on several occasions and was observed at close as 150-200 yards w/ 9x35 binocs. All observations were made in light to moderate rain.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Seen with Red-tailed Hawks in flight and was distinctly different in size (larger), proportions (longer wings/tail), slower wing beat and hovering flight, and in above lighter coloration and in some distinctive field marks.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? no, not to my knowledge. field marks

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: light to moderate rain; moderate to strong light w/ shadows; distance varied from close of 150 yds to more than 1/4 mile, estimated; 9x35 Bushnell Lince binocs.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Familiar w/ species from western states; saw several in wild prior
References and persons consulted before writing description: none
I have professionally photographed Red-tailed & Rough-legged Hawks in captivity. Summer

How long before field notes made? initial notes this form completed? 24 hours later.
made on the spot

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

Steve Dinsmore 4024 Arkansas Dr. Ames, IA 50010