

Ferruginous Hawk

5 Dec 1999

Hitchcock N.A., Pottawattamie Co., IA

\*Mark Orsag

IBL 70:95, 144

Record Number: 99-32

Classification: A-D

## DOCUMENTATION

\*Mark Orsag, 944 Forest Ave. Apt 4, Crete, NE 68333 [4/14/00]

## REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 70:95

Records Committee: IBL 70:144

## VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Wing shape, underparts, "windows," reddish in the upperparts, and dihedral all support the description, not to mention location that seems likely for this species.

Additionally, the observer seems very familiar with Ferruginous and similar species. Regarding the observer, I do not know Mr. Orsag, but am impressed with the detail provided on what was seen, and the candor regarding what was not.

A-D, The observer is familiar with this species and carefully considered all the alternatives. In my opinion all similar species were satisfactorily eliminated.

A-D, This is a well-described bird seen at a time and location in the state that are both very reasonable. The comparisons and elimination of all possible species and races is impressive.

A-D, Many good features were seen on this bird by a prepared observer with prior hawk watching experience. The white wing panels are not described as to shape, orientation, extent, or location, but are said to be on the primaries (without the inclusion of the primary coverts). The differences in shape and flight style of this bird and Red-tails were obvious to the observer. The possibility of Krider's Hawk was well discounted by head color and other features.

A-D, Supportive features include the long wings (uniform middle with pointed tip), the lack of white in the upper wings and body, white in the upper primaries, dark cap, white underparts, and observer experience with this species. Equivocal findings were "wings in a moderate, but somewhat U-shaped dihedral", "back was brown with hint of red", "head seemed reddish brown", "dorsal surface very well seen"...but "the bird's tail wasn't seen well." I do not understand some of the jargon used in the description: "headlight markings", "plank-like", "bullet-shaped", "points of light". The lack of commas on underwing are inconsistent with Ferruginous Hawk, but this is a very difficult field mark to evaluate. Other marks that were not seen, and would be difficult to see under the circumstances, include feathered legs, spots on the upper tail coverts, large bill and gape, and spots on flanks. The description is reasonably complete, although the distance is not given and the upper tail (critical) not seen as well as I would have liked. The wing

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shape, dark back, and wing with hint of rufous, gray tail with white base, white underparts, and pattern of flight finally convinced me to accept this record of a species that has been notoriously difficult to identify in Iowa.

A-D, Interesting discussion of possible R T Hawk variants. I believe these are satisfactorily eliminated. Observer experienced with Ferruginous. Not a tough ID if observer experience with Ferruginous.

A-D, A wonderfully detailed document.

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**Documentation Form**  
**Unusual Bird Sightings in Iowa**

**Species:** Ferruginous Hawk (light morph immature)

**Location:** Hitchcock Nature Area (Lodge Hawkwatch Point)

**Habitat:** Loess Hills / Missouri River Valley. The bird was coming from out of the valley. It crossed the wooded ridges of HNA and headed southeast. Light conditions were good—optics were 30x90 tripod mounted binoculars.\*

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Length of observation:**

(see following page)



12/5/99

9:00 am

Approximately 1 minute

**Name and Address: Mark Orsag**

**944 Forest Ave. Apt 4**

**Crete, NE 68333**

**Other Observers: n/a**

**Description of bird:** Originally seen while I was observing some Ring-billed Gulls. Bird flew low with heavy, steady downpushing wingbeats. Flight was fluid with wingbeats NOT centered at the wrist. The bird flapped steadily toward the hills; it did, however, interrupt the powered flight with two glides. During the first glide, it held its wings in a moderate, but somewhat U-shaped dihedral. When it tilted slightly in flight, I got a good look at the underside and wing shape. Wings were long, plank-like and pointed, body was bullet-shaped and heavy. Bird was large in comparison to the nearby gulls. The second glide was shorter. The bird shifted quickly out of a flat-winged glide to once again adopt a dihedral. "Headlight" (white) markings were looked for on the leading edge of the wings but not observed.

Dorsal surface was very well seen as the bird was below eye-level for all of its approach. Back was brown with a hint of red. Inner parts of wings were also brown. Outer part of wings somewhat grayish brown. Light (white) patches clearly visible on both sets of primaries. Head seemed reddish brown and appeared dark in contrast to the bright white of portion of throat/upper chest visible from above. Because of the angle, the bird's tail wasn't well seen, but I can say that it looked gray above and in the instant I was able to see it (white below). Uppertail coverts appeared whitish in contrast to gray tail, but were also not well seen. I did not have time to look for any spotting on the uppertail coverts. Underparts were seen best when the bird changed course in flight, and when it tilted during its longer glide. They appeared to be very, very white. I perceived absolutely no markings at all. I got two very quick but good looks. The left and right underwings definitely displayed "points of light" fieldmark. I was the lone observer. I have extensive experience with this species, having seen it in Western Nebraska, Utah, and Nevada.

**Similar species and how eliminated:** I considered 5 other species of raptor in total. I eliminated two possibilities (Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Harrier) within seconds of seeing the bird in question. I eliminated two others (Bald Eagle [imm.], and Red-tailed Hawk more or less during the minute or so that I had the bird in view. \*\* ❄️



How long before field notes made?

This form completed?

Immediately

One day

\* \* I reviewed, in my head, the fine points of the Krider's Red-tailed Hawk for a few seconds after the bird had disappeared from view. The fifth species came to mind just before I started writing this report (the next day). I retroactively eliminated it. In reconstructing my reasoning, I believe: Rough-leg was eliminated due to the unmarked white throat, breast, underwings, and underside. Northern Harrier was eliminated due the large size and robust shape of the bird, the flight pattern (especially wingbeat), the unstreaked white throat, etc. Immature Swainson's Hawk later eliminated by dark head, white wing patches on primaries, lack of dark flight feathers on underwing, unlikelihood of December sighting. Bald Eagle immature- (whitebelly I-II) was eliminated by the downpushing wingbeat, the colors of the bird's dorsal surface, the lack of a contrast on the dorsal surface between the brown-gray forward part of the wing and the darker flight feathers (a little known good fieldmark for Immature BE), and the confining of the white coloration to the primaries, etc.

Red-tailed Hawk-This species, in light of its similar (but smaller) size and variable plumages, posed the greatest problems. The dark upper surface, dark head, pointed wings, and pattern of flight (dihedral in glide posture), as well as the distinct and identical nature of the white markings on the upperwings and the lack of patagial marks, "commas", or other dark markings on the underside, were considered in total and used to rule out the immature light-morph Red-tail and, on reflection, a partial albino Red-tail. Krider's Red-tailed Hawk was the toughest to rule out. Here are my reasons: 1. Krider's heads appear white/light in contrast to the darker (gray or brown) color of the back. This bird's head was not lighter in color (on top) than the back. Back coloring was too dark (brown-reddish) for Krider's—no white mottling seen. Wings were pointed not rounded. No "headlight" fieldmark was seen and the "points of light" fieldmark was. Dihedral in glide unusual but not impossible for a Red-tail, but the wingbeat (fluid and downpushing rather than centered

on the downstroke at the wrist) did not look like a Red-tailed's.

Send mail to [iowabirds@iowabirds.org](mailto:iowabirds@iowabirds.org) with questions or comments about this web site.

Last modified: 25 April 1999.

\* 30x90 tripod-mounted binoculars produced for the Russian military by the Zagorskii Optical and Mechanical Factory. Hand-ground optics/high quality.



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