

Ferruginous Hawk
23 Dec 1984
Otter Creek Marsh, Tama Co., IA
*T. Kent
IBL 55:26, 58

Record Number: 84-34
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Thomas H. Kent

LETTER

Kim Eckert (see below)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 55:26

Records Committee: 55:58

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

VOTE: 3-III, 3-IV, 1-abstain

IV, Probably correct I.D. but I think we should not rely on just one diagnostic mark. This bird is uncommon in the best of its range, yet we seem to be having a rash of Iowa sightings. I think that a minimum of 2 of the 3 marks given by Eckert should be seen, as well as other marks (i.e., white tail, dark V, etc.).

IV, Brief nature of sighting and light conditions leave reasonable doubt.

IV, I tend to disagree with Eckert on the assumption that only one diagnostic feature is needed to separate a Ferruginous from a Red-tail. Red-tails are utterly confusing in their variation. I would possibly agreed had I been assured that the bird's rump was distinctly not of a Red-tail and it had some rufous coloration on wings (shoulders) or elsewhere.

III, A well-reasoned identification--diagnostic location of wing patches was seen.

III, Sounds like you got the diagnostic feature right.

OUTSIDE REVIEW: The documentation was sent to Kim Eckert and his reply was, "Tom Kent's record: I'd need more information to tell. That is, all I'd need is a sketch of what was seen. If there was 'dark in front of the [white wing] patch', then OK for Ferruginous. The imm. Red-tail's patch is a square or rectangle which extends to the leading edge of the wing (if a rectangle it runs more parallel to the body's axis). The Ferruginous' patch is a rectangle or long oval that runs along the base of the primaries (i.e., is more perpendicular to the body's axis) and does not extend to the front of the wing. But if the patches were 'as wide as they were long', then it sounds more like a square Red-tailed type patch. Since written words can be misleading, just sketch what was seen. By the way, it's not just the Krider's-type Red-tailed that shows white on the wings--immatures of 'normal' darker birds typically show them. Also, these patches can appear very prominent--at least as obvious in many cases as the Ferruginous."

REVOTE (at meeting, 18 May 1985): 4-III, 2-IV, 1-abstain

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 possibly 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 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.

Anderson, R. M. 1907. The birds of Iowa. Proc. Davenport Acad. Sci. 11:125-417.

Bohlen, H. D. 1986. The status of Ferruginous Hawk in Illinois. Illinois Birds and Birding 2:40-41.

Brown, W. H. 1971. An annotated list of the birds of Iowa. Iowa State J. Sci. 45:387-469.

Clark, W. S. and B. K. Wheeler. 1987. A Field Guide to Hawks North America. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Dalmon, P. A. 1929. [no title]. Bull. Iowa Ornithologists Union 2:23.

Dalmon, P. A. 1933. A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa. Iowa City: University of Iowa Studies in Natural History, Vol 15.

Dalmon, P. A. 1934. Observations of the Ferruginous Rough-leg in Iowa. Wilson Bull. 46:262.

Gilmer, D. S., D. L. Evans, P. M. Kourad, and R. E. Stewart. 1985. Recoveries of Ferruginous Hawks banded in south-central North Dakota. J. Field Ornithol. 56:184-187.

I. O. U. Records Committee. 1986. Official Checklist of Iowa Birds 1986 Edition. Iowa Bird Life 56:46-55.

Janssen, R. B. 1987. Birds in Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Johnson, Mrs. R. W. 1939. A record of the Ferruginous Rough-leg. Iowa Bird Life 9:8.

Musgrove, J. W., et al. 1947. Shorebirds in the Spirit Lake area. Iowa Bird Life 17:17-18.

Petersen, P. 1962. Ferruginous Hawk in western Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 32:86.

Pierce, F. J. 1930. Birds of Buchanan County Iowa. Wilson Bull. 42:253-285.

Schmutz, J. K., and R. W. Fyfe. 1987. Migration and mortality of Alberta Ferruginous Hawks. Condor 89:169-174.

Spiker, C. J. 1924. Birds of Wapello County Iowa. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 31:419-426.

Stephens, T. C. 1918. Bird records of the past winter, 1917-1918, in the upper Missouri valley. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 25:71-83.

Stephens, T. C. 1930. Bird records of the two winters, 1920-1922, in the upper Missouri valley. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 37:357-366.

Stiles, B. F. 1946. Ferruginous Rough-leg in Polk County. Iowa Bird Life 16:65.

Stoner, D. C. 1920. Bird records for the season 1919-1920 in the vicinity of Iowa City. Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci. 37:379-384.

Whitney, N. R. et al. 1978. The Birds of South Dakota. Vermillion: South Dakota Ornithologists' Union.

Wilson, B. L. 1986. Identification of Ferruginous Hawk. Iowa Bird Life 56:100-104.

RR1, Box 41, Hastings, IA 51540

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Date	County	Reference	Comment
25 Jun 1901	Black Hawk	DuMont 1933	specimen lost?
before 1907	Linn	Anderson 1907	detail, Clark-
4 Nov 1914	Vasello	Spiker 1924	dead bird, no detail
17 Sep 1917	Woodbury	Stephens 1918	mounted, no detail
2 Apr 1919	Keokuk	DuMont 1933	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	no detail
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
11 Apr 1934	Clay	DuMont 1934	no detail
17 Apr 1934	Emmet	DuMont 1934	detail, Clark-
20 Mar 1936	Woodbury	Siles 1946	no detail
21 Aug 1936	Iowa	Unity, 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	Fremont	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
1963	Cherokee	IBL 34:20	no detail
26 Dec 1966	Bremer	IBL 37:5	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	Bremer	IBL 45:8	no detail
Feb 1977	Lucas	Roosea and Bartlett 1977	no detail
27 Oct 1977	Pocahontas	Gilmer et al. 1985	road kill, banded
27 Oct 1977	Page	doc, IBL 47:144	no detail
3,7 Feb 1979	Johnson/Iowa	doc (2), IBL 49:24	Clark-
26 Dec 1980	Fremont	doc, IBL 52:42	Clark-
26 Oct 1983	Page	doc, IBL 54:38	RC(83-31)+, Clark+
22 Sep 1984	Marshall	doc, IBL 55:58	RC(84-24)+, Clark-
25 Oct 1984	Pocahontas	doc (2), IBL 55:58	RC(84-23)+, Clark+
23 Dec 1984	Tama	doc, IBL 55:58	RC(84-34)-
28 Mar 1985	Cherokee	doc, IBL 56:44	RC(85-03)-
29 Sep 1985	Story	doc, IBL 86:44	RC(85-16)+, Clark+
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 oldest 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.

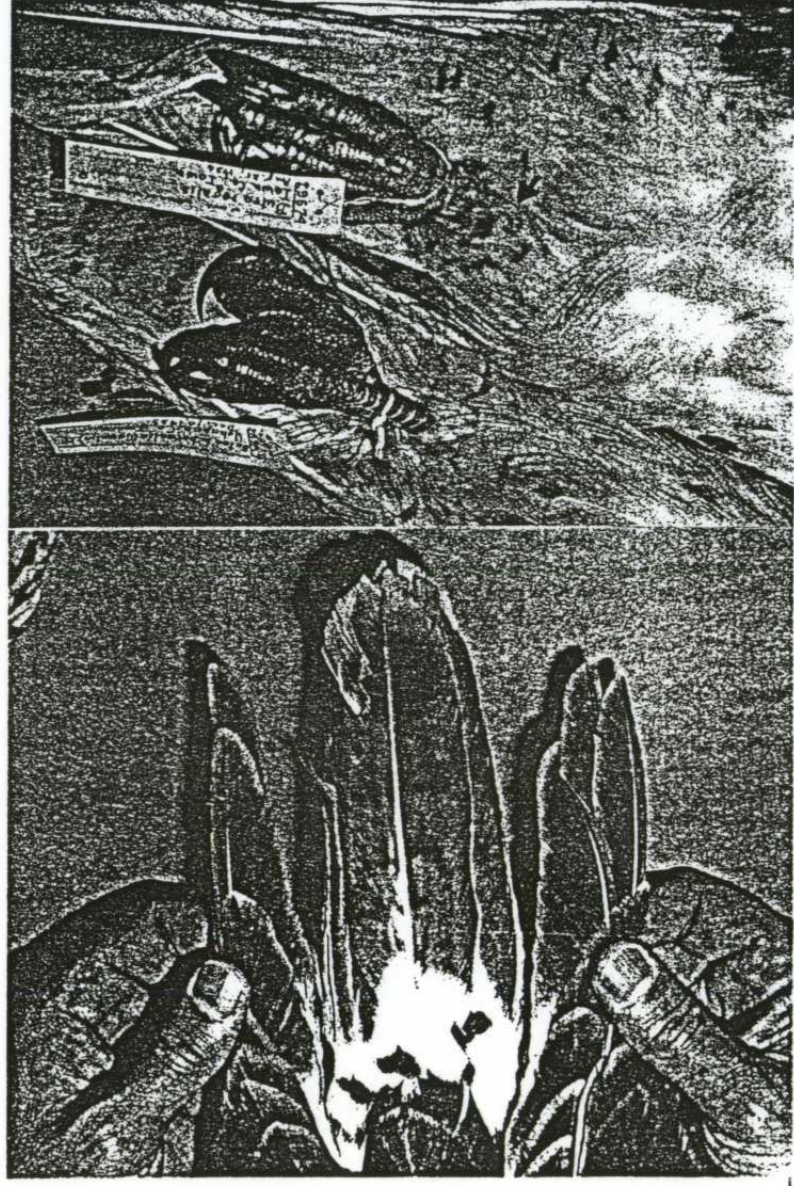
The status of Ferruginous Hawk in other nearby states confirms that Iowa is on the edge of the species range. The hawk is not known to breed in Minnesota, but is a regular, rare migrant in spring and fall, especially in western part of the state near its Dakota breeding range, and spring sightings are 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 Frye (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.

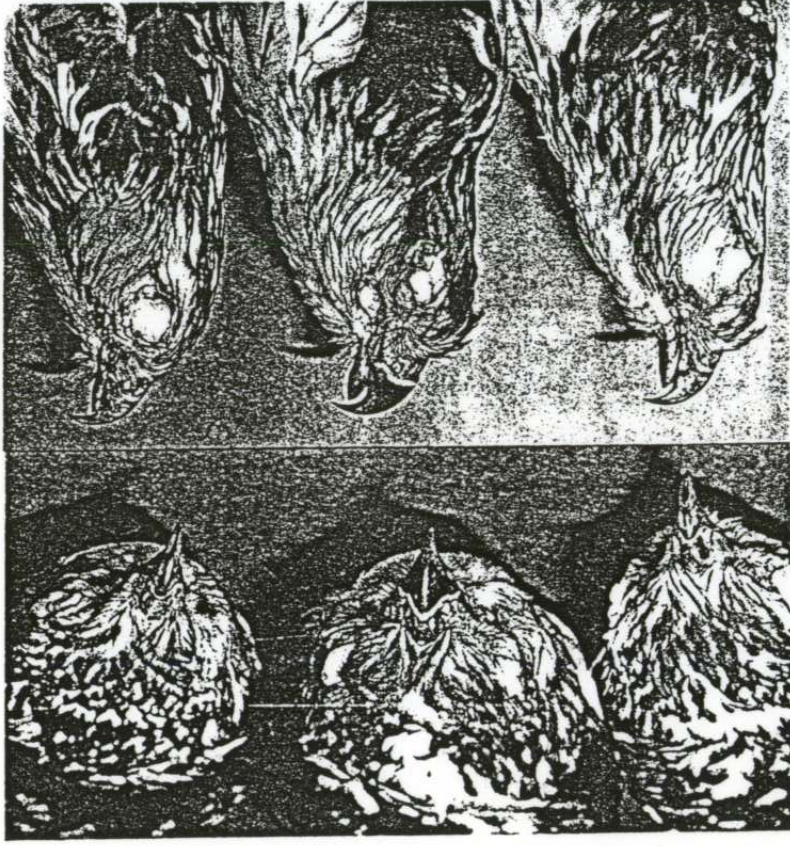
At least five records of Ferruginous Hawk in Iowa appear to be substantiated, and some of the others were likely correctly identified as well, but are not adequately described. Three of the five acceptable records are from the last ten years, barely enough to consider the species Casual. Iowa is just 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.

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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 larva with dark spots (arrow) compared to Red-tailed Hawk above with unfeathered larva. 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.



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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Ferruginous Hawk, 23 Dec 1984, Otter Creek M., Tama Co., Iowa
Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240
Other observers: none.

Time: 2:45 PM for 1-2 minutes.

Habitat: large, wide riverbottom marsh with scattered woods.

Description: "Large buteo flying over dike with very prominent white upper wing patches running anterior-posterior over the base of the primaries. White tail--I couldn't tell whether it was entirely white to the tip. The upper portion of the wings appeared dark and the under portions of the bird appeared all white. It did sail a bit with wings raised above the dihedral. Otherwise, I was not able to see any feathering on the legs at the distance the bird was from me. I could not make out any color due to the overcast conditions. The bird flew west down the dike and was lost to view. I walked the dike past the power lines during the next hour, but did not re-find the bird." The white patches on the upper wing surface appeared to be centered at the wrist with dark in front of the patch. I was uncertain whether the white extended to the trailing edge. The patches appeared about as wide as they were long.

Song: not heard.

Behavior: large, heavy-flying buteo, sailed a little; did not hover.

Conditions: heavy overcast with gray sky, no wind, 100 yards (est), 10X binoculars.

Similar species: According to Eckert, the upper wing patches are diagnostic if the location is right. He gives the following example as an acceptable documentation: "On the upper surface of each wing there was a rectangular or oval white patch on the flight feathers. This patch was on the inner primaries, and perhaps faded a bit into the secondaries and outer primaries." This description fits the bird I saw. Eckert gives two other diagnostic marks that I did not see (feathered legs, rufous back and shoulders), but only one of these three marks is needed. The white tail is not diagnostic, but coupled with the light underparts and generally dark upper wing surface, tends to exclude Krider's and Harlan's Hawks which would have light upper wings and dark underparts, respectively. An ordinary Red-tailed Hawk would not ordinarily have an all white-tail nor such prominent upper wing patches. The raised wings in flight in the absence of wind favor Ferruginous Hawk over Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks. Rough-legged Hawk is excluded by the lack of prominent black and white pattern to body, wing and tail.

Previous experience: Have seen this species in Colorado and North Dakota.

References/time used: Looked at field guides and Eckert article (Ferruginous Hawk identification, Loon 54 (3):161) the next day.

Time of notes/taped: dictated 80 min. after sighting, typed 18 hours later.