

Ferruginous Hawk
13 03 1988
9 e. of Osage, Mitchell Co., IA
*Mary Jo Hartogh
IBL 58:80

Record Number: 88-01
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Mary Jo Hartogh
VOTE: 4 A-D, 2 NA

A-D. Positive: Buteo with all white underside except for "cinnamon red" leggings and similar color outline to underwing coverts is almost certainly an adult light phase Ferruginous. The side view of a dark back and white unbanded tail are consistent with this species, but are somewhat less conclusive. The eyebrow line seen on head is also good for this species. Negative: Little detail about size and shape. No mention of long narrow wings, although if mental comparison was being made to Rough-Legged Hawk, this would be a similar shape bird. Perhaps reference to eagle was based on impression of large size, but this is not clear. Description of white head is not very clear. Was it really white, or just relatively lighter than the bird's back, for example? This view was 200 yards without optical equipment so description is based somewhat on general impression and not a detailed view. On balance, the positive features serve as conclusive description.

NA. Could be Red-tail, especially since rufous leggings weren't described. No mention of white wing patches or longer-winged appearance of Ferruginous.

A-D. Red leggings on hawk with white below, dark above, and white tail are diagnostic of adult Ferruginous Hawk. Light head with supercilliary white stripe and cinnamon underwing markings are supportive. Viewer should have commented on wing shape (long, narrow), angle of wings (dihedral), and upper wing surface (crescent white at base of primaries).

NA. I myself have seen two Red-tailed Hawks that had both a white head and white tail with an indistinct low broken belly band. Since the birds mentioned were a very light color the usually brown to dark brown coloration was more of a reddish brown color. On these birds I was able to get close enough to see that the low broken belly band were not on the thigh area but just on the lower belly near the thigh area. The patagial area was not mentioned. Size comparison to Rough-legged Hawk surprised me somewhat; Ferruginous should look quite large (partially because of wing to body proportion and shape.) This could very well be a Ferruginous Hawk but I am not totally convinced, there is just too much variability in the Red-tailed Hawk.

A-D. Plumage description appears diagnostic for adult bird. Wing pattern, tail, head color, and legging "patches" all seen. Problems are location (rather far east), although timing is perfect, and lack of description in comparative fashion of flight characteristics and white wing patches. I believe description adequately eliminates most likely possibility, Krider's Red-tail (& even Opsrey, Bald Eagle, etc.)

REVOTE: 4-A-D, 3-NA

A-D. Rufous leggings were mentioned which seems not likely to be confused with a low indistinct belly band.

NA. White head suggests Krider's Redtail whereas light head would suggest Ferruginous. I agree with the N/A comments stating that light phase Red-tail demonstrate a reddish-brown belly band and underwing markings. Seeing the eyebrow line with no binoculars at 200 yds suggest goshawk instead of Ferruginous. Although the description fits Ferruginous Hawk, a 200 yd view for less than a minute from a moving (?) vehicle is not an adequate view to identify a rare and in my experience accidental bird.

NA. I still don't think this bird is described well enough, especially since this species is, at best, of problematical status in Iowa. The observer saw "two large, cinnamon red patches on lower abdomen." What was the shape of the patches? They could have been legs, or they could have been patches on the flanks. The observer never specifically stated that the bird had rufous leggings. Also, the wing pattern just wasn't described in enough detail. Adult Ferruginous should have an obvious white crescent at the base of the primaries on the upper surface of each wing. Observer didn't mention any such patch, although this patch should be very obvious, even at a distance. Observer mentioned dark back, but no wing patches. More detail on wing pattern, location of rufous patches, and wing posture are needed. Also, distance and lack of optical equipment raise some doubt about record.

A-D. I agree with the negative voters that some features are missing from the description: white wing patches, rufous shoulders, wing shape, dihedral wing, lack of malar stripe, and lack of petagial stripe. If the red marks on the abdomen are leggings, which I think they are, they are diagnostic.

NA. I am still not convinced that this was a Ferruginous Hawk. Too many additional details were not given in the documentation to say conclusively that this was a Ferruginous Hawk and not a Red-tailed Hawk. Wing shape, wing attitude, upperwing description all not given. Cinnamon red patches on the lower abdomen not described clearly enough or adequately enough to tell if they were on the legs or belly. Just not enough information given to convince me that this is for sure a Ferruginous Hawk.

A-D. The NA comments are not strong enough to reject. We have been extremely cautious on this species.

A-D. First NA-"cinnamon red patches" on lower abdomen were indeed probably on the thighs. "Long-winged appearance" also inferred by comparison with Rough-leg. I disagree with this NA analysis. Second NA-male Ferruginous is not large-not much difference from Rough-leg or large Red-tail. "two large, red cinnamon-red patches" could hardly be explained away as "an indistinct low broken belly band." This negative analysis is not based on sufficient hard data.

SENT TO: Mary Jo Hartogh, RR 2 Box 115, Elma, IA 50628

What species? Ferruginous Hawk How many? 1

Location? 9 mi. E of Osage along a gravel road-Mitchell Co.

Type of Habitat? Hayfield near a road

When? date(s): March 13, 1988-Sunday morning time: 8:25 AM to 8:26 AM

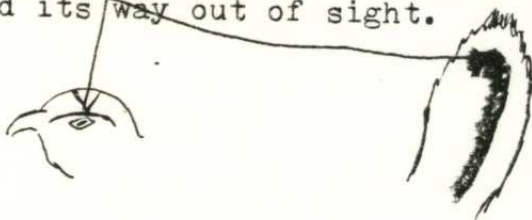
Who? your name and address: Mary Jo Hartogh, R#2 Box 115, Elma, IA 50628

Others with you: My husband John driving the car and my daughter Annjean

Others before or after you: 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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

Approximately 400 yd. away we noticed a buteo-shaped hawk, about the size of a recent rough-legged hawk we'd seen, approaching us. As it gained altitude, we had a good view of the underside which was completely white except for two large, cinnamon red patches on the lower abdomen and the inner part of the wings were outlined in the same bright color. When it was about 200 yds. away, it made a 90 degree turn and crossed the road in front of us giving a side view which showed a white tail with no bands, a dark back, and a white head. I noted that at that angle it could be mistaken for an eagle. As it flapped its wings, I noted that the cinnamon red lines ended in a heavier patch near the wingtips. You could also see an eyebrow line on the head. It just slowly flapped its way out of sight.



Similar species; how eliminated: Compared it with a bald eagle and red-tailed hawk which does not have large reddish patches where the legs would be held in flight, nor the outline inside the wings in the same color. A red-tail might have one or the other white, but not both tail and head in my experience. Also the red-tail usually has a darker shade of brown on its middle belly, if it has color there. The rough-legged has a dark tail band which at that proximity should have been seen and its color is also a darker brown.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No

If yes, explain: Only I studied for a week trying to disprove what I saw.

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

The Dakotas, Nebraska, and Minnesota were getting hit with a terrific snow-storm that morning. It was overcast and snowing lightly. The sun would have been at our back as we were headed east. No time for binoculars!

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

None-Life bird. I've seen many red-tails and several rough-leggeds.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

The new Hawks guide, Petersen guide, Golden Guide, Master Audubon, National Geographic guides.

How long before field notes made? 1 hr. this form completed? 1 wk.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).