

Ferruginous Hawk

3 Jun 1989

5 mi. n of Paulina, O'Brien Co., IA

*Dick Bierman

IBL 59:78, 81, 61:85

Record Number: 89-20
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Dick Bierman

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 59:78,81, 61:85

Records Committee: IBL 61:65

VOTE: 4 A-D, 3 NA

A-D. Not a lot of detail in this documentation, certainly much less than other records for this species that I have voted against. Fortunately, the detail that was given was enough as at least one of the marks that was described is diagnostic: a buteo that is all light underneath except for fully feathered dark legs forming a "V". Other excellent supporting features include the prominent dark comma on the underwing and a white patch in the primaries, although this patch should have been described in more detail about the shape and exact location.

A-D. Convincing description of adult Ferruginous. Feathered tarsi, while normally described as difficult to tell for sure, was more convincing due to distance, lighting, and zoom scope. "V" of legs also helped. Light undersides and un-banded tail also supported description.

A-D. The observer did not describe the primary patches, the patagium area, color of the leggings, or specifically eliminate Rough-legged Hawk. However, the observer did see the four most diagnostic field marks of an adult Ferruginous, white primary windows, feathered legs to the feet, unbarred tail, and "V" pattern of leggings. The pink-tinged plain tail seems to eliminate Rough-legged, also time of year. The feathered legs to the feet eliminates all forms of Red-tails.

NA. As near as I can tell, all features seen on this bird (esp. wing and tail pattern, underwing pattern, and general color) are consistent with Red-tail except one, that being the dark legs. But how well were the "fully feathered to the ankle" legs seen? At the distance this bird was seen, I would think it would be difficult to tell for sure whether or not the legs were fully feathered or not. A Red-tail, when crouched, might appear to have fully feathered legs. I need to know now well and in what context the legs of this bird were seen.

A-D. Dark feathered tarsi are diagnostic of this species (adult). Dark upper wings with window, pink tail, and light underwings are a good fit. Other features that would have helped include rufous on wings, long uniform width wings, lack of patagial stripe, flight pattern (dihedral), and head details. We aren't given any details of what the bird was doing--siting on ground? Flying? Viewing time rather limited and distance great, but if features described were accurately seen, then they are diagnostic of an adult Ferruginous Hawk.

NA. Is it possible to see feathering on legs at this extreme

range? I have "perceived" feathering on legs of Red-tailed Hawks at this range or closer before getting a closer look at a lighter tailed Red-tailed Hawk. All the marks noted are interesting but I don't think they adequately describe Ferruginous Hawk. What about: color and shape of head, no mention of shape of white patches in upper surface of wing, coloration of upper surface of bird, no mention of lack of pagatial mark, flight pattern and habits while in view. The V pattern sounds very good in this description but I'm not sure it is completely consistent with other areas not documented. Normally this V mark of leggings on light belly would be conclusive but for some reason I am not convinced. Late date also makes me wonder about this bird. Mr. Bierman could possibly have seen a Ferruginous Hawk but I need more for an acceptance vote.

NA. While details given are persuasive, and the bird appears to have been an adult, I would like to have seen information about upperparts--presence or absence of rufous. Back was "dark", but was there any white speckling, as in most Redtails (and in some Ferruginous)? Date of observation is also unlikely, although does not obviate the record. Description of comma on underwing vs. Red-tail is excellent for Ferruginous. Tough call, but I vote NA with the expectation of a discussion.

REVOTE: 4 A-D, 3 NA

NA. The NA voters raise valid points regarding the observability of the important features on this bird.

A-D. I agree with A-D concerns that distance was a problem. I also agree with Wilson (IBL 56:4) that "Birds seen at a great distance or for a short time usually should be left unidentified." While distance was substantial, the bird was evidently seen twice for a combined period of 13 minutes. However, I feel that the great distance casts doubt only on whether the tarsi were feathered. Some NAs expressed concern about marks not seen, specifically the rufous back. I too would like to have seen a more thorough description, but am satisfied with the marks that were seen. Most field guides and references that I have access to (Bent, Peterson, NGS, Master Guide) were relatively brief in their treatment of diagnostic points for adult Ferruginous. There was a consensus that white underparts, dark legs forming a "V" in flight, and unbanded pinkish or rusty tail mark this species. This rules out Red-tailed (white leggings in adult, narrowly barred tail in immature light phase, and Rough-legged (dark belly). Swainson's would be in South America, and other buteos are not even close. Additional support comes from wrist comma and "windows" in the primaries, although some Red-tails can also show these. I feel that the combination of features seen make this record beyond reasonable doubt.

A-D. I dispute one of the NA's contention that only one characteristic is not consistent with Red-tail, the dark legs. I also think feathered tarsi, dark back, primary windows, and unbarred tail are not consistent with Redtails. I am still voting A-D based on what was reported as seen even though I would have liked more detail. Other supporting factors are the experience of this observer with long range raptor identification and the fact

that the original sighting was confirmed when the bird was relocated.

NA. I must admit that this is a difficult record to review. The leg pattern is the only feature described that should eliminate Red-tail. On the other hand, other marks of a Ferruginous Hawk (shape and position of wing patches, wing shape and posture, color of the upperwings, and head color were not described, although they should have been fairly obvious. This record is certainly less detailed than the Jan 1989 record from SW Iowa we just rejected. Perhaps this record should be reviewed by outside consultants (other than B. Peterjohn!).

NA. If the observer could provide more information on the conditions under which the leggings were seen, I might be convinced. If the leggings were seen on a sitting bird, then I would discount the observation since Red-tails can appear to have feathered legs when belly feathers cover the legs. If the "V" was seen on the bird overhead, that would be more convincing, but the distance was great. If the wing comma was drawn, why wasn't the leg pattern drawn? Both should be evident under the same conditions on a bird overhead.

A-D. I still have some reservations about this sighting. I do not think that feathering of the tarsi could be seen from this range, even with a telescope. I will admit that the "V" shaped pattern formed by the legs is pretty diagnostic for this species. The other field marks mentioned could very well describe a Red-tail. The words "as described in most books" makes me wonder if what was described was actually seen. Information gleaned from books can influence how a person's mind remembers and describes a sighting. I can not tell if that is the case here or not. Because of the dark "V" shape of legs I will change my vote to A-D.

A-D. Commentors are persuasive, except for time of occurrence. Not impossible however in early June. Probably non-breeder?
SENT TO: Dick Bierman, 901 Harris, Cherokee, IA 51012

What species? Ferruginous HAWK How many? 1Location? Smiles North of Paulina Iowa O'Brien Co.Type of habitat? FLAT, Agricultural, only farm Groves for TreesWhen? date(s): June 3, 1989 time: 8:15 AM - 8:18 AM
9:40 AM to - 9:50 AMWho? your name and address: Dick Bierman 901 Harris Cherokee IA 51012others with you: NONEothers before or after you: ---

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.

Red Tail size buteo. Dark back & wings on top. The primaries had some white on them giving a "window" effect. The tail was very light pink to cream colored. No banding or terminal band was present. The legs appeared dark and fully feathered to the ankle. The ^{legs} formed the "V" on the belly as described in most books. The underside of the wings, belly and tail were light. The bird did have the coma consistent with red tails at the waist but it seemed longer.



Similar species and how eliminated: Swainson's Hawk have dark primaries. Red Tails with light tails have a terminal band. This one didn't. Red Tails do not have dark legs that are feathered to the ankle.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? ---If yes, explain: ---

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

Good light 300 To 500 yards. 15 TO 60 Bush-Lomb Discoverer spotting scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I've seen Ferruginous in So. DAK. and Wyoming. I'm very familiar with Swainson's.

References and persons consulted before writing description: National Geo. Field Guide

How long before field notes made? at sighting this form completed? 2 hrs.

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

see
Back
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I made this sighting at stop 13 of my breeding bird survey (Federal). After I finished my survey I returned and found the bird at stop 16. It seemed to only reconfirm my original I.D. I feel I have noted the confirming details as I knew what to look for without consulting a book.

I do realize that RedTails come in every shade from Kriders to Warlans and was very careful to eliminate these i.e. Tail unbandel, no terminal band. and dark legs feathered to ankle.

