

10-95-21

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**COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT**

**HARRIS' HAWK**

Parabuteo unicinctus

Location: 1/2 mile west Manzanola; Otero County, Colorado

Date: October 14, 1995

Brandon Percival and I were returning from a morning spent birding in the lower Arkansas River valley. We were headed west on Highway 50. A quarter mile east of mile marker 358 Brandon told me that he might have seen a "good bird" on the telephone pole that we had just passed. I stopped the car and we turned around, and headed back east to the spot where he had seen a perched hawk. Before we even pulled off the road and parked I could see that the bird looked like a Harris' Hawk. We parked directly across the road from the perched bird - about 50 yards away. I pulled out my Kowa scope and set it up and we watched the bird through binoculars and scope (as high as 60X) for about 10 minutes. The bird filled the field of view and we observed every detail. We watched it from 12:05 - 12:32 p.m. perched (front back and sides; as well as looking up from underneath) and in flight (from sides, top and back). It flew and changed perches three times. Besides the telephone pole, it perched about 2/3 of the way up a tall cottonwood, nearly hidden in foliage and high in a dead elm over an abandoned farmhouse. This area is open farmland and shelter belts less than 1/2 mile south of the riparian corridor of the Arkansas River. We viewed the bird in excellent light from 50-150 yards away and left the bird perched by the farmhouse. Others saw the bird on the morning of the 15th (Bob Dickson; Dave Johnson). The bird appeared totally wary, wild and was in beautiful unworn plumage. It lacked bands or jesses.

Description:

This was an adult bird in fresh plumage. It was an overall rather small buteo, about 20" long. It was slim, long-tailed and rather big-shouldered but small-headed when perched. [see attached field sketches] The bird was overall dark at a distance. The body was a flat, dark grayish-brown. The shoulders (upper wing coverts) and leggings were chestnut (reddish-brown). The dark grayish-brown back feathers had very narrow buffy fringes. The tail was black with a 3/4" wide white terminal band. The uppermost portion of the tail and lower rump were pure white, making a conspicuous narrow white rump patch in flight. The tail was much longer than the folded wings and quite rounded at the tip. The undertail coverts were fluffy white. The eyering, cere, legs and feet were yellow. The talons and strongly hooked bill were gray. The iris was yellowish-brown. In flight, the bird reminded me some of a Red-shouldered hawk. It had quick, active wingbeats with the wings held bowed. When it set its wings to circle it held its wings flat. The bird was dark in flight with the conspicuous white undertail, rump band and terminal tail band. The flight feathers were blackish and the upper and under wing coverts were chestnut. This was a very striking bird.

Similar Species:

This was a Buteo, as could be seen by the large size, hooked bill, plump shape and medium-length wings. No other Colorado Buteo has chestnut shoulder and leggings, a white rump, and a black tail with a white terminal band. A dark phase Ferruginous Hawk completely lacks the rump and tail pattern of this bird and has white, not black, underwing.

Experience With Species:

I have experience with all North American Buteos.

This report was prepared from notes made at the time of observation.

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12:05 - 12:32 pm (total) perched  
 (front, back & sides) & briefly  
 in flight from sides, top  
 & back. As close as 50 yds.,  
 & as far as 150 yds. Perched  
 on telephone pole, & in cotton-  
 woods. Excellent sun  
 from back; In scope (20x)  
 & binocs.:

Overall smallest vireos;  
 big-shouldered but  
 rather small-headed,  
 slim & long-tailed:

FROM  
BACKFROM  
FRONT

Overall dark-colored:  
 Body flat dark grayish-  
 brown. Back feathers w/  
 pale buffy fringes. Tail  
 black with  $\sim 3/4$ " tip pure  
 white. (Tail much longer  
 than folded wings & gills)