

General Field Notes

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Swainson's Hawk in North Carolina

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About 0930 on 9 December 1979, while traveling south on the US 17 bypass of Vanceboro, Craven County, N.C., just south of the railroad crossing, we saw a hawk crossing the road ahead of us. At first sight the slight upturn of the wings suggested a Marsh Hawk, but the larger size and flight pattern were not right for that species. We were able to pull off the road and get out of the car to observe the bird for 2 minutes or more. We studied the bird carefully in good light and at all angles as it circled around and over us as low as 15 and 20 feet. Field marks were studied with and without binoculars (7X). The bird then soared off into the bright sun.

We were able to view the almost uniform grayish-brown dorsal portion of the body and wings, and the upper tail was noted to have a slightly lighter colored rump patch. From below, the wing linings and body were almost white. There was an almost "wing window" look in the primaries. The light buffy tail was very lightly barred and had a darker and wider terminal band. The dark brown chest band was conspicuous, giving the bird a hooded look. It was a case of "just like the book" except the tail bands were not quite as dark as the soaring light-phase Swainson's Hawk in *Birds of North America* (Robbins, Bruun, Zim, and Singer, Golden Press, New York, 1966, p. 81). Having seen hundreds of these hawks in various plumages in the spring in Texas and many more crossing the plains during the summer, we have no doubt that this bird was a Swainson's Hawk.

[NOTE: See the report of the North Carolina Records Committee elsewhere in this issue.—DSL]

A Probable Winter Record of Swainson's Hawk from Tyrrell County, N.C., with Comments on a Fall 1965 Sighting from the Outer Banks

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As Potter traveled east on U.S. 64 about 1500 on 1 February 1980, a pale buteo flew from a snow-covered plowed field just east of Columbia, Tyrrell County, N.C. The bird took flight from the ground approximately 35 m ahead of the car and 4 m off

the right shoulder of the road. Gaining altitude without flapping its wings, the hawk flew across the road, passing directly in front of the observer at 7 to 10 m, or perhaps even closer as the car slowly moved beneath the flight path. The bird fully exposed its underparts to view in bright sunlight for at least 3 seconds, and Potter immediately realized the bird was unlike any buteo commonly found in the Carolinas.

During the brief period of observation, Potter noted that the bird's lower breast, belly, and tibias were immaculately white and that across the upper breast was a solid band of rich reddish brown. The brown extended up the side of the neck and joined the darker nape and crown. The rusty breast and neck framed a large, oval, unstreaked white patch on the throat and chin. No streaking or barring was detected on the breast band, which was slightly darker posteriorly and sharply delineated from the white underparts. The under-wing and -tail surfaces appeared predominantly whitish. The flight feathers of the wing were narrowly tipped and barred with varying shades of dusky gray. Wing linings were almost pure white, having no conspicuous wrist marks. There was no noticeable contrast between the wing linings and the flight feathers, but bright sunlight reflected off the snow may have reduced the appearance of contrast to the unaided eye. The tail was narrowly tipped with a subterminal band of dark gray or faded black. This band was not as wide as in a typical adult Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*). The remainder of the underside of the tail was mostly hidden by the legs and feet that extended almost to the anterior edge of the dark band. The brevity of the observation made it impossible to determine whether or not the rest of the tail was faintly banded.

Unfortunately, traffic conditions and snow piled on the shoulders of the road prevented stopping or turning around immediately. The bird could not be found upon return to the site about 15 minutes later. The authors believe that the bird was a light-phase adult Swainson's Hawk (*B. swainsoni*). We are aware that other buteos in aberrant plumages can be mistaken for *B. swainsoni*, which is well known for its variability in plumage.

There is an earlier sight record of the species from North Carolina for which details have not been presented previously. Sykes (1967) recorded a Swainson's Hawk in Dare County on 11 October 1965 during a study of landbird migration on the Outer Banks. At 1450 the bird was found perched on the top of a fence post at the intersection of NC 12 and the road to the Oregon Inlet Coast Guard Station on the northern tip of Pea Island. The hawk was studied at 9 m with 7 x 35 binoculars under clear sky conditions. When the bird was at rest, heavy brownish streaks formed an almost solid band across the breast and faded gradually into the belly. The throat and belly were white. The head was streaked with brown, and the back was rather uniform dark brown. The dorsal surface of the tail was brownish-gray with four or five narrow dark bands and a narrow white terminal band. It was not noted whether or not the last tail band was wider than the others. The bird appeared slender for a buteo. The tips of the folded wings extended almost to the tip of the tail. When the hawk flushed, it flew away from the observer a short distance at a gradual climb to gain altitude, at which time a buffy or whitish patch was seen in the rump area. The hawk then soared overhead for a short time before it moved off and disappeared. While the bird was soaring, the tips of the wings appeared distinctly pointed and the broad wings formed a dihedral as in the Marsh Hawk (*Circus cyaneus*). When viewed overhead, the light wing linings and the belly contrasted with the dark primaries and secondaries, and the underside of the tail appeared rather light. This individual was obviously an immature Swainson's Hawk.

Wind directions and speeds (in knots) at Pea Island for the day of the sighting and the preceding 3 days are as follows: 8 October—WSW 16 at 0800, SW 17 at 1600; 9 October—W 10 at 0800, SSW 13 at 1600; 10 October—NW 11 at 0800, NW 15 at 1600; and 11 October—NW 7 at 0800, ESE 5 at 1600. According to US. Department of Commerce Daily Weather Maps for 7 through 11 October 1965, wind directions

from the western edge of the Great Plains east to the Atlantic Coast were from the west, northwest, and southwest during the 5-day period. Thus, weather conditions were favorable for this western raptor to reach the Outer Banks of North Carolina in early October.

The breeding range of the Swainson's Hawk is throughout most of western North America from central Alaska south to northern Mexico and eastward to Manitoba, western Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and western Texas. The species winters chiefly in Argentina and is of casual occurrence in eastern North America: Ontario, Quebec, Michigan, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Alabama (Pough 1951, AOU 1957, Peterson 1964, Brown and Amadon 1968, Audubon Field Notes 1968-1970, American Birds 1971-1979). In Florida it is a regular spring and fall migrant in small numbers, and a few, mostly immatures, winter annually in the southern part of the state (Sprunt 1954 and 1963, Cunningham 1961, Abramson 1961, Ogden 1969, Audubon Field Notes 1955-1970, American Birds 1971-1979). Thus, based on the abundance of the Swainson's Hawk, its broad distribution, highly migratory habits, and casual occurrence in eastern North America, it is not particularly surprising for individuals of this species to be found in North Carolina, although a winter record is certainly rather extraordinary.

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[NOTE: See the report of the North Carolina Records Committee elsewhere in this issue.—DSL]

Lesser Black-backed and Glaucous Gulls at Huntington Beach State Park, S.C.

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On 27 January 1979, in connection with a field trip at the Pawleys Island, S.C., Carolina Bird Club meeting, several dozen birders observed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) and an immature Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*) at