

First Documented Record of a Swainson's Hawk in North Carolina

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On the morning of 3 October 1993, Dean was birding in the vicinity of the old Coast Guard station on the south side of Oregon Inlet. On the previous weekend, the Carolina Bird Club had held its fall meeting on the Outer Banks, and several uncommon birds were found near the station. On the third, however, very few birds were present despite favorable northwest winds of 15-20 knots.

At approximately 0730 EDT Dean was leaving the area when he noticed a large raptor sitting on the crossbar of one of the telephone poles alongside the road. It seemed to be sheltering itself from the stiff wind. The bird was facing away from him and he could see that it lacked the pale scapular marks of a Red-tailed Hawk. The head appeared pale and did not have the "helmeted" look of a Red-tailed. The back was dark with pale spotting. The bill was not visible. Dean studied the bird closely for several minutes and noted the following additional field marks. The breast was buff-colored and lacked a breast band. The upper breast was coarsely streaked. After several minutes, the bird suddenly and rapidly flew east over the dunes and disappeared. In flight, the wing linings were pale and the flight feathers appeared darker. Based on these observations, he identified the bird as an immature Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*). Dean searched the area without relocating the bird. After 10-15 minutes he gave up and headed south towards Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, thinking that the bird may have moved that direction. A short time later, he met Dinsmore and Susan Grove. All of us immediately returned to the old Coast Guard station, where we unsuccessfully searched for the bird for half an hour.

At that time, Dean headed south to watch for the bird from the south dike platform of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, while Dinsmore and Grove went north across the inlet. At 0921 EDT, Dinsmore and Grove were driving south past the old Coast Guard station when they spotted a raptor perched on a telephone pole in the same location where Dean had first seen the bird. They stopped and quickly confirmed that the bird was an immature Swainson's

Hawk. They studied and photographed the bird until 0944. The following description was written during the observation by Dinsmore.

The bird was clearly a *Buteo* because of the relatively broad wings and short, broad tail. The bird appeared to be roughly the size of a Red-tailed Hawk, though there were none there for direct comparison. When perched, the head was noticeably paler than the wings and back. The bird had a distinct white eyebrow and a dark whisker. The crown was dark. The bill was dark and decidedly small. The upperwings and back were dark brown and mottled with light brown/buff spots. In flight, these paler spots were seen to be confined to the secondary coverts on the upperwing. The throat was buff-colored. There was extensive dark brown color on the upper breast, forming a nearly complete bib. The rest of the breast and belly were buff-colored with smaller, dark brown spots on the lower breast. Feathers on the upper leg were also buff-colored with dark tips. The undertail coverts were buff/white and unmarked. The legs were yellowish. The bird made several short flights between telephone poles, allowing detailed observations of the wing and tail patterns. The bird appeared long-winged in flight, probably because the wings were narrower and more pointed than the wings of a Red-tailed Hawk. The underwing coverts were a rich buff color with obvious dark spots at the tips of many of the feathers. Both surfaces of the flight feathers were dark brown and unmarked. The contrast between the undersides of the flight feathers and wing coverts was not as pronounced as on an adult Swainson's Hawk, but was still evident. The tail pattern was distinct: rectrices dark, a large white patch on the rump and uppertail coverts (similar to the rump patch of a Northern Harrier), and underside of rectrices lightly barred. Also, the wingtips extended nearly to the tip of the tail on the perched bird, an indication of how long-winged the bird was. At approximately 1100, Dean again observed the bird perched on a telephone pole about 2 miles south of the old Coast Guard station. Dinsmore and Grove observed the bird soaring high over Avon between 1334 and 1338. The bird was not seen again.

This is the third accepted record of a Swainson's Hawk in North Carolina (N.C. Bird Records Committee, 1995), the first to be confirmed by a photograph (*American Birds* 48:160). Two previous sight records have been accepted by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee: single birds on 11 October 1965 at Pea Island, Dare Co. (Potter and Sykes, 1980) and 21 March 1982 near Garner, Wake Co. (Tarbet and Coburn, 1982). Two additional sight records of single birds have not been accepted by the committee: 9 December 1979 in Craven Co. (Cox and Ball, 1980) and 1 February 1980 in Tyrrell Co. (Potter and Sykes, 1980).

Literature Cited

- Cox, G, and E Ball. 1980. Swainson's Hawk in North Carolina. *Chat* 44:76.
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- Potter, E F, and P W Sykes, Jr. 1980. A probable winter record of Swainson's Hawk from Tyrrell County, N. C., with comments on a fall 1965 sighting from the Outer Banks. *Chat* 44:76-78.
- Tarbet, D D, and K Coburn. 1982. Sighting of a Swainson's Hawk in North Carolina. *Chat* 46:80-81.

Townsend's Warbler on the Coast of North Carolina

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Just before noon on 7 November 1992, Roger McNeill was birding along the northern dike of North Pond at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County, NC. The weather was cool and overcast, with a still wind. Among the loose flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*) that were flycatching from the shrubbery was a bird with bright yellow on the face that also made a sally from the bushes. McNeill noticed the bright circle of yellow around the face that also extended down the breast, and he then realized that the bird was a Townsend's Warbler (*D. townsendi*). The yellow was offset by a black center spot in the shape of a football. The yellow was in the basic shape of the "C" used as a symbol for the Cincinnati Reds baseball team (*i.e.*, pointed at the closed end of the "C"). Toward the bottom of the cheek patch, near the base of the bill, was a yellow patch shaped like a crescent moon. Black was seen on top of the head as well as mottled on the throat, and thick black streaks were present down the side of the breast. The black triangle across the breast came to a thin point at the base of the bill and was broad at the base of the throat. The yellow extended halfway down the breast past the throat line and extended into the black lines down the side. The lower breast and belly were white. Two bold, thick wing bars were present; both were gray-white in color and about the same size, just slightly offset. The top of the back was olive and