

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS  
SIGHT RECORD FORM

CFO-RC FILE #: 1997-21

PHOTO

(FIRST STATE RECORD)

RESULTS: ACCEPTED 6-1

rec'd 11-28-97

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE. ATTACH PHOTOGRAPHS AND ADDITIONAL PAGES IF NECESSARY.

SPECIES: Crested Caracara

Polyborus Plancus

(Common Name)

(Scientific Name)

DATE(S) OF OCCURRENCE: September 29, 1997 - injured bird captured

NUMBER OF BIRDS SEEN: one SEX: unknown PLUMAGE: adult-feathers bleached

EXACT LOCATION: Co. Rd. 71.1, two miles north of Trinidad, 1/2 mile west of I-25

COUNTY: Las Animas

NEAREST TOWN: Trinidad

ELEVATION: 6000

LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: see narrative

TIME(S) OF OBSERVATION: before 9:00AM

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO SAW THE BIRD(S) WITH YOU:

- Unidentified school bus driver whose bus apparently hit the bird
- Will Dunnihoo, a local landowner, who first saw the bird and called DOW
- Bob Holder, a DOW employee, who captured the bird

OTHER OBSERVERS WHO INDEPENDENTLY SAW THE BIRD(S):

none

LIGHT CONDITIONS (QUALITY; DIRECTION RELATIVE TO BIRD(S); POSITION):

unknown

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT USED:

unknown

DISTANCE FROM BIRD (ESTIMATED UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED):

WAS BIRD PHOTOGRAPHED? YES IF SO, HAVE YOU SUBMITTED PHOTOS? YES

WHO TOOK THE PHOTOGRAPHS? Trinidad Chronicle reporter and Heidi, a re-hab center employee

DESCRIBE THE GENERAL AND SPECIFIC HABITAT IN WHICH THE BIRD(S) OCCURRED:

According to Bob Holder, it was open rangeland with some brush, cholla cactus and scattered pinion/juniper. He mentioned that there was a dead chicken on the road a ways up from where he found the Caracara.

DESCRIBE THE BIRD'S BEHAVIOR (FLYING; FEEDING; HABITS; BEHAVIORS USED IN IDENTIFYING THE SPECIES OR IN SUPPORTING THE IDENTIFICATION):

When Holder found it, the bird was hiding in some roadside brush. As he approached, it ran into an arroyo and tried to hide in a pile of tumbleweeds. At the re-hab center, it retreats to the farthest corner of its cage and becomes agitated if a worker in the room with it moves too fast or makes too much noise.



DESCRIBE THE BIRD IN DETAIL. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS REPORT. INCLUDE THE OVERALL SIZE AND SHAPE AND HOW YOU PLACED THE BIRD IN THE GENERAL GROUP THAT YOU DID. GIVE COMPLETE DETAILS OF PLUMAGE, INCLUDING HEAD, THROAT, UNDERSIDES, NAPE, BACK, WINGS AND TAIL. GIVE PARTICULAR EMPHASIS TO MARKS YOU USED TO IDENTIFY THE BIRD(S). DESCRIBE OTHER DETAILS, SUCH AS COLOR AND SHAPE OF BILL, LEGS, EYE, ETC. THAT WERE IMPORTANT IN MAKING THE IDENTIFICATION. (FILL OUT THIS PORTION EVEN IF PHOTOGRAPHS ARE SUBMITTED; YOU MAY ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS, DRAWINGS, FIELD SKETCHES OR COPY OF FIELD NOTES):

On the morning of September 29, 1997 Bob Holder, a DOW employee received a phone call from an area landowner, Will Dunnihoo, who told him he had seen an injured hawk by Co. Rd. 71.1 two miles north of Trinidad. 71.1 Rd. runs parallel to I-25 about 1/2 mile west. Holder drove to the spot and found a large hawk-like bird hiding in some roadside brush. He told me later, "the bird couldn't fly, but it sure could run." As he approached, the bird ran into an arroyo and attempted to hide in a collection of tumbleweeds. Holder was able to corner it in the tumbleweeds and capture it with a towel. This happened at 9:00AM. He took the injured bird to a local veterinarian, Dr. Chip Aaroe who x-rayed it and discovered that it had a chipped humerus. Otherwise it seemed healthy and in good condition. The husband of one of the vet's employees who works for the Trinidad Chronicle took a photo of the strange patient, now identified as a Crested Caracara, and wrote an article for his paper (see enclosed).

The day the article appeared in the Chronicle, Holder received a call from a local school bus driver, who said that he had been driving on Rd. 71.1 early on the morning of 9/29 when a large bird flew low across the road in front of him, and his bus "clipped it."

The injured Caracara was eventually taken to Dr Eggleston, a vet in Colorado Springs who has experience treating injured raptors. On October 8, Eggleston took the bird to the BIRDS OF PREY FOUNDATION near Broomfield where it appears to be healing and eating well. It is now in one of the center's large flight cages, and plans are to release it somewhere in Texas when it is well.

Is this a wild bird or an escapee? Sigrid Ueblacker who has been the head rehabilitator at the center since its beginning in 1982, told me that all signs point to it being a wild bird. On 10/8 when she first saw it, the Caracara's feathers were bleached out by the sun as she would expect. Raptors held in captivity for any length of time have darker more colorful plumage. Further, the Caracara showed no tail feather wear, lack of beak wear or the unusually long toenails all of which indicate to her that a bird is an escapee or a recently released captive.

*had they been present would*

What was this bird doing in southern Colorado? PETERSON'S FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF TEXAS-99 says that the Crested Caracara is a casual straggler in the North Texas Panhandle, not all that far from southern Colorado. Clark's FIELD GUIDE TO HAWKS OF N. AMERICA says Caracaras are non-migratory, but individuals wander into states adjacent to their breeding range. Clark also says they cruise highways searching for road-killed animals. Furthermore, the remains of hurricane NORA moved into the SW corner of Colorado on 9/26, a possible factor.

**WHAT IS YOUR PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES?**

Regarding the yellow facial skin on the bird in the close up photo. Clark says that Caracara facial skin changes color depending on mood, ranging from orange on normal adults to bright yellow, indicating excitement. The close up photo of our Caracara was taken on 10/8, the day it arrived at the FOUNDATION at which time it was somewhat traumatized.

**LIST BOOKS, GUIDES, RECORDINGS OR OTHER SOURCES CONSULTED AND HOW THIS INFLUENCED YOUR IDENTIFICATION (DURING AND AFTER OBSERVATION):**

Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF TEXAS - 1988

William S. Clark's FIELD GUIDE TO HAWKS OF NORTH AMERICA - 1987

**THIS REPORT WAS MADE FROM NOTES MADE DURING** NO **OR AFTER** This report contains  
**OBSERVATION, OR LATER FROM MEMORY** information obtained from interviews with persons  
**DATE OF WRITTEN REPORT:** November 21, 1997 involved in the above narrative.

**REPORTING OBSERVER:** Gail Evans - 303-758-2231

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**SIGNATURE:** *Gail Evans*

I am a volunteer at the BIRDS OF PREY  
FOUNDATION

*1480 S. Jasmine  
Denver, CO 80224*



**Saturday's Nos.**  
**3-12-15-16-31-39**

(no winner)



**Weekend recap**

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**Happenings**

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1997-21

# Chronicle-News

Monday, October 6, 1997 25 cents

## Rare bird drops in

BY CASEY DUKEMAN  
C.N. Staff Writer

A local veterinary clinic in Trinidad played host to a rare species of bird last week.

The Crested Caracara, which primarily hunts the South American prairies and rangelands, was brought into the clinic last Monday by the Colorado Division of Wildlife to be examined by local vet Dr. Skip Aaroe.

The bird of prey, rarely found in areas of southern New Mexico, Arizona and Texas, was brought to Dr. Aaroe by DOW official Bob Holder. Local resident Will Dunnihoo found the bird just north of Trinidad. Dr. Aaroe diagnosed the rare bird as having a broken wing. After a week of being administered a special diet of canned pet food, the bird, which feeds primarily on carrion, was slinged and is currently recovering nicely. It was slated to be shipped to the DOW main office in Denver on Friday, October 3, for further observation by birds of prey specialists. The Caracara will be released into the wild somewhere in southern Colorado when it is completely healed.

The Caracara is an uncommon bird which covers a range as far south as Terra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands. "It is never found here in Colorado," remarked Holder.

Holder further adds, "It is important for people to contact the Division of Wildlife or local vets when rare birds such as this are found."

How it came to an area hundreds of miles north of its natural habitat is still unknown.







photo by Heidi Bucknam

Injured 9/29/97 near  
Trinidad, Co

photo taken 10/8/97

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