

2001-102

2000-34

DOCUMENTATION FORM

Rec'd 11/08/01 (1)

Species: Common Black-Hawk

Number: 1

Location: Montrose, Montrose Co., Colorado

Habitat: circling over sage scrubland just east of town

Date: 9 June 2001

Time: 2:30-2:42 p.m.

Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 1/2 West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521

Others who saw bird(s): G. Gordon Brown

Description of bird(s): We were headed west into Montrose on Highway 50 when I spotted a dark soaring raptor that reminded me of a Black Vulture in silhouette. We immediately stopped and were able to study the bird for more than ten minutes (including several minutes with a spotting scope) as it lazily drifted off to the south. All of our views were from below and we never saw the dorsal surface of the bird.

It was immediately apparent that the bird was a buteo and not a vulture because of the yellow legs and banded tail. Size was hard to judge on a lone bird; I estimated it was roughly the size of a Red-tailed Hawk based on impressions from earlier that day. The most striking feature was the general shape of the bird. It had exceptionally broad wings (much like those of a Black Vulture), an appearance that was perhaps exaggerated by the extremely short tail. The leading edges of the wings were bowed slightly forward, and the head projection was noticeable and greater than that of a vulture. The tail was extremely short, protruding but a few inches (estimated) beyond the trailing edge of the wings. The underparts were solid black, with two exceptions. First, the basal area of the primaries (perhaps 30-40% of their visible length, excluding the portion covered by the greater underprimary coverts) was noticeably paler than the rest of the underwing, and sometimes had a silvery appearance when the bird banked. Second, the short tail was mostly black with a narrow white terminal band and a much broader white subterminal band. The other distinctive feature of this bird was the legs. The legs were bright yellow and extended nearly to the tail tip when the bird was soaring. The bird also had a most unusual habit of frequently dangling its legs downward, more like a Northern Harrier than a buteo. On the basis of the above description, we identified the bird as an adult Common Black-Hawk.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of size, general shape, dark plumage, underwing pattern, and tail pattern should eliminate all other raptors. I was especially interested in ruling out three potentially similar species: Zone-tailed Hawk, a dark morph Broad-winged Hawk, and a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk. I believe the combination of shape, tail pattern, and long legs safely eliminates all forms of Red-tailed Hawk. A dark morph Broad-winged Hawk was eliminated on the basis of its smaller size, more strongly banded tail, underwing pattern showing more extensive white color at the bases of the primaries, shorter legs, and general shape. Zone-tailed Hawk was eliminated on the basis of general shape, a longer, more strongly barred tail, and shorter legs. I did not consider dark morphs of other buteos (e.g., Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks) to be similar enough to this bird to merit a detailed discussion here.

Previous experience with species: I have seen only a few other Common Black-Hawks, all of them in Mexico. I am very familiar with Red-tailed Hawks of all morphs and subspecies and I have limited experience with two other similar species (dark morph Broad-winged Hawk and Zone-tailed Hawk).

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were excellent with clear skies and the sun behind us. Estimated viewing distance was 200-300m for most of the observation. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope (the bird was in view long enough to put a scope on it).

References consulted: Sibley *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

How long before field notes written? brief notes written during observation  
How long before this form completed? form completed on 13 June 2001