

Accepted (7-0)

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

GYRFALCON
Falco rusticolus

Location: near Jim Hamm Park; Union Reservoir; Longmont; Boulder, Colorado

Date: January 7, 1995

Setting:

This bird was discovered by others and seen by many. I saw the bird on a Saturday morning. With me were Brandon Percival, Bob Dickson, Joe Roller, Bill Fink, John Prather and many others. It was a cold morning with high clouds. It took us about 2 hours to locate the bird. We observed it from about 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. from distances of 100-400 yards (est.). I watched it through scopes, including Bob's Questar. The bird perched on metal and wood power poles, fence posts and on the ground. We saw the bird at various angles and in flight.

Description:

The bird was an adult gray phase (or "morph") bird. It was very large, about the size of a Red-tailed Hawk, very long-tailed and very fast and powerful in flight. When perched it was broad-shouldered, hunch-backed and long-tailed. It perched with an erect posture and the very long tail extended inches beyond the folded wings. In flight it was broad-winged (especially at the base) and with a relatively rounded wing-tip for a falcon. In flight the tail was long, wide and rounded. The bird's flight was ground hugging and very fast. It would fly directly over the surface of a snow-covered field then characteristically swoop up at the last second to perch. The flight took a minimum of motion, "rowing" the wing-tips through the air. It seemed to rapidly flick just the outer half of the wing to propel itself. The legs, feet, cere and prominent eye-ring were bright yellow. The eye was dark. The bill was bluish-grey with a hooked black tip. The crown, face and upperparts were medium, flat grey with narrow, faint tan margins. This gave the bird a vaguely scaled effect at close range. The undersides were white, heavily streaked and barred with grey. The barring effect was most marked on the flanks and leggings. The sides of the neck and nape were grey speckled with white. There was an obscure dark moustache mark, most pronounced at the bottom where it met the throat. The tail was rounded at the tip and grey with blackish bars. The bird was greyish-white below in flight and quite uniform-looking in flight.

Similar Species:

Relatively pointed wings and long tail indicate a falcon. Northern Harrier has a white rump and leisurely flight. Buteos have broad wings, less direct flight. Kestrel and Merlin are much smaller, nowhere near the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. Prairie Falcon is tan, shorter-tailed and has black wing-pits. The Peregrine Falcon has a marked moustache, unstreaked face, shorter tail and is smaller and less powerful in flight.

Experience With Species:

I have seen all the falcons. I have seen two previous Gyrfalcons, both grey phase birds. The first was in Kansas in the winter of 1990 and the second was in Duluth, Minnesota in January 1992.

This report was prepared from notes made after the observation.

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001

Mark Janos