



190-01-1990

DARK-MORPH RED-TAILED HAWK IN NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

by Rick Wiltraut

On January 19, 1990, I was driving along Richmond Ave. in Forks Township, Northampton County looking for wintering raptors in the area, specifically Rough-legged Hawks (Buteo lagopus). I had just finished studying an adult male light-morph Rough-leg when I spotted a very dark Buteo at the top of a tree which I assumed was a dark-morph Rough-leg. When I scoped the bird however, I noticed that this bird lacked the light spot on the nape that dark Rough-legs often possess. Before I could check for any other marks, the bird took off. I was immediately struck by the flight pattern which was quite unlike that of a Rough-leg, but more like that of a Red-tailed Hawk (Buteo jamaicensis). It also lacked the long-winged look of a Rough-leg. Unfortunately, I never got a clear look at the tail and the bird soon disappeared. I reported the bird as a dark morph Red-tail, but it was never seen again.

On January 13, 1991, I was assisting Steve Boyce with his banding study of American Kestrels (Falco sparverius) in the county. We were in the Richmond Ave. area when Steve spotted a dark Buteo at the top of a high tension tower directly across the road from where I had seen the dark Red-tail almost exactly a year ago. Steve assumed it was a dark Rough-leg until I mentioned to him that this was the spot where I had seen the dark Red-tail last year. Eventually the bird flew and landed on a telephone pole close to the road where we could clearly detect

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unfeathered tarsi and a rufous red tail. I had previously seen dark Red-tails as a raptor counter at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory in Michigan, but never had the opportunity to study one so closely. A beautiful bird.

The bird was seen in the area until January 17th, then disappeared. On January 20th however, Steve and I were kestrel banding along the Belvidere-Martins Creek Highway about 7 miles northeast of <sup>the</sup> Richmond Ave. location when we spotted a dark-morph Red-tail on a pole next to the highway. Since the other bird hadn't been seen for 3 days, we assumed that the bird had moved to this spot. It was seen off and on at this location throughout the winter and was last seen on March 30th.

According to Clark (A Field Guide to Hawks, 1987), dark-morph Red-tails winter primarily on the Great Plains, rarely in the East. He also mentions that even in their normal wintering areas, dark-morph birds are "relatively rare, but can constitute as much as 10% of a local population". Occasionally, dark or melanistic individuals are reported from hawk lookouts along the Kittatinny Ridge in fall.

Record No.: 190-01-1990

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # of

Species: Red-tailed Hawk (dark Phase)

Date of Sighting: 13 January 1991 to 30 March 1990

Observer(s): Rick Wiltraut

Date of Submission: 1991 Northampton

Submitted by: Rick Wiltraut

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Leberman			X				
G. McWilliams			X				
S. Santner	X						
P. Schwalbe	X						
TOTALS	5		2				
DECISION	X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

*Bm Haas*

Date:

*3/7/92*