

**Dark-Morph "Western" Red-tailed Hawk**  
*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*  
Centre County

190-01-1992

**Ted Floyd**

Jeff Hoover and I saw an adult dark-morph "Western" Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*) in Centre County at 12:00 p.m. on Sunday 23 February 1992. This form is rare in eastern North America during the winter (Clark and Wheeler 1987), and there are occasional records from Pennsylvania's Kittatinny Ridge in fall (Wiltraut 1991). A recent record is from Northampton County during the winter of 1991 (Wiltraut 1991).

The bird was in a small field along Atherton Street about 3 kilometers north of State College. We observed the bird perched and in flight for about thirty minutes. Skies were clear, and viewing conditions were very good. A light-phase Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) was nearby.

We viewed the perched bird at a distance of 30 meters. Its entire body was very nearly black. Its cere and feet were bright yellow. When it flushed, its evenly-colored bright red tail was evident. The tail struck me as being more of a solid red than the rufous-red that is characteristic of "Eastern" Red-tailed Hawks.

When the soaring bird was viewed from beneath, it imparted a two-toned appearance, very much like a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*). Its flight feathers were gray, and its underparts and wing coverts were entirely black. The underside of the tail was a pale rosy color. On banking, the bird's brightly colored dorsal tail surface was evident. I could not discern the U-shaped dihedral that is thought to be characteristic of "Western" Red-tailed Hawks in flight (Dunne et al. 1988).

We observed the bird with 8.5X44 (tf) and 7X35 (jh) binoculars. The bird was observed on subsequent dates by other area birders.

Literature cited:

Clark, W.S. and B.K. Wheeler. 1987. *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston MA USA.

Dunne, P., D. Sibley, and C. Sutton. 1988. *Hawks in Flight*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston MA USA.

Wiltraut, W. 1991. Dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk. *Pennsylvania Birds* 5:22.

Western Red-tailed Hawk  
*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*  
Centre County  
Jeff Hoover

190-01-1992

I saw a mature dark phase Western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*) in State College at 12:15 p.m. on Sunday, 23 February 1992. This subspecies breeds in the western United States north to Alaska, but as a migrant and wintering bird it is <sup>occasionally</sup> ~~commonly~~ seen along the Atlantic seaboard (Dunne et al. 1988).

The hawk was first seen perched on a telephone pole in the field north of the farmhouse located to the Northeast of the intersection of Vairo Blvd. and Waddle Rd. The bird remained perched while I observed it with my binoculars from 50 m away. The left side and front of the bird was very dark (almost black) and had no distinguishing marks that I could see from this vantage point. Initially I thought that the bird was a dark phase Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), but it was the size and shape of a Red-tailed and had a shorter tail than a Rough-legged.

As I moved closer to get a better look, the bird flew from its perch and began to soar overhead. When the bird took off I immediately could see the red tail without my binoculars. The bird started circling low in the sky and I positioned myself in the middle of the circle to observe it as it gained altitude. I observed it overhead with binoculars for about five minutes. On the underside the hawk had a black body, black wing coverts, whitish flight feathers with little barring, and a red tail (not orange or rust). When in flight, the underside coloration of the bird looked like that of a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) except for the red tail.

In the case of most raptors, identification stops at the species level. In some cases (e.g. the Red-tailed Hawk) adult birds may be identified at the subspecies level with a fair level of confidence (Dunne et al 1988). The hawk that I observed lacked several common markings of the Eastern Red-tailed (*B. j. borealis*). The hawk was not white on the underside, did not have a belly band, did not have a white chest, did not have a lot of

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splotching or patterning on the underwing, and did not have a dark "comma" located at the wrist (carpal area) of the wing.

There are three phases of the Western subspecies: light, rufous, and dark. On both the light and rufous phase calurus birds, typical Red-tailed markings are visible. The hawk that I observed was completely black with the exception of the flight feathers and tail, and the typical Red-tailed markings were invisible. The only subspecies that this bird could be confused with is the Harlan's Hawk (*B. j. harlani*). However, the Harlan's Hawk has white speckling or mottling on the dorsal surface, chest, and underwings and a streaked dirty white or gray tail. The absence of the mottling and the presence of the red tail absolutely preclude the possibility of Harlan's Hawk.

The bird was observed under fair conditions (sunny, winds 10-15 mph, 48°F) at close range with 7X Bushnell binoculars. Ted Floyd also observed the bird.

#### Literature Cited.

Dunne, P., D. Sibley and C. Sutton. 1988. Hawks in Flight. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts.

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Record No.: 190-01-1992

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # 1 of

Species: **Red-tailed Hawk**

Date of Sighting: **23 February 1992**

Observer(s): **Ted Floyd, Jeff Hoover**

Date of Submission: **1992**

Submitted by: **Ted Floyd, Jeff Hoover**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater			X				
B. Haas		X					
F. Haas		X					
R. Ickes		X					
G. McWilliams		X					
S. Santner		X					
J. Skinner		X					
TOTALS		6	1				
DECISION		X					

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

Date: 7/2/93