

FIRST BANDING OF SHORT-TAILED HAWK

By Erma J. Fisk

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On December 17, 1967, in Homestead, Florida, in a pine grove beside a main highway, I moved to furl a net I had set in a stand of millet. From a small brushy copse of trees a large, dark bird flushed and hurtled directly into the lowest trammel of the $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch net. I sprinted the intervening 100 feet in record time and grabbed it, knowing only that it was the largest bird I had ever caught. Fortunately the feet were not entangled so that holding it by back and shoulders, I was able to lift it out and constrain it - it was as startled as I was - until I could figure a way to transport it to my boss, Dr. Wm. B. Robertson, Jr., who would be home reading his Sunday paper. There was nothing in my car but a small grocery bag and an extra net, so I trussed my now struggling and malevolent captive in the latter. It was a hawk, but S. Florida has many hawks in such wide varieties of plumage that even the experts often hesitate to identify some in the field.



This one was no exception. Unwrapped and in the hand, Dr. Robertson and his assistant, John C. Ogden, to whom Short-tailed Hawks are of special interest, were unwilling to identify it until its measurements and markings could be researched. After a little experimentation as to size, and a few puncture wounds to teach me respect, I settled on a #6 band for it, and John took it to his hawk pen in Everglades National Park for study.

The bird was in adult plumage but with what appeared to be a juvenal tail pattern (JCO). Above, it was wholly dusky brown, with head, nape and primaries darker. The primaries were barred. The tail had seven bars: it was faded and worn. The tail pattern was the extreme limit of the adult range (JCO). Below, the body and wing linings were dark brown, but flight feathers and tail, under wing coverts and alulas, were light, barred with dark. The four outer primaries were distally dark for perhaps half their

length, contrasting strongly with their clear upper halves, this forming the white "window" which is a field mark of the species. The tips of the secondaries were narrowly barred so that the bird appeared to be rimmed with brown (also a good field mark). There were no white patches above the cere, as is shown in most field guides(JCO).

By measurements and by the notches of the three outer primaries, the hawk was identified as a large adult female Short-tailed Hawk, Buteo brachyurus. It is interesting that it should have been caught from so low a perch as customarily this species hunts from high in the air, plummeting down upon its prey. Presumably, it came into the copse in a short period when I had been off on other business.

Although Short-taileds can be seen in Everglades National Park in winter, they are rarely recorded in Homestead. For reasons of safety this one was released in the Park instead of in the residential and citrus grove area where it had been captured. So far as we know, this is the first one of its species banded. (The Banding Office has not yet confirmed this.)

17101 S.W. 284th St., Homestead, Florida 33030

THE EBBA EDUCATION COMMITTEE REQUESTS YOUR HELP

How many times have you explained banding to a neighbor's child, or to a passer-by who wondered what you were doing with those nets or traps? Would you be willing to do the same thing to groups involved in conservation education? Many of us feel that EBBA members can make an important contribution to local nature classes, scout troops, and the like, by giving banding demonstrations. These need not be formal lectures, and in fact are probably more effective if they are very informal talks, explaining what banding is all about, how it is done, and what a bander hopes to accomplish by this rather mysterious and complicated-looking process of catching a bird and putting a band on its leg.

EBBA is going to begin to put conservation education leaders in touch with banders in their area. Nature teachers, scout leaders, etc. will write in to me and I shall send them a list of the EBBA banders (if any) in their region. It will then be up to the teachers to contact the local bander to see if he or she is willing to talk to their group. If you do not feel qualified to give a demonstration, or if you are petrified at the thought of a sea of small inquisitive faces, of course you do not have to agree. This is purely a voluntary program. But we do hope you will give any request that might come to you a thoughtful, and hopefully positive consideration. You will be making a genuine contribution toward a broader public understanding of bird banding.

Dr. Mary Heimerdinger Clench, Chairman, Assoc. Curator of Birds, Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Penna. 15213