

NOTES

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FIRST REPORT OF FUERTES' RED-TAILED HAWK FROM FLORIDA

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The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) exhibits much variation in plumage coloration among age classes, color morphs, and geographical races. Over its wide range from Alaska to Panama to the Virgin Islands, 14 to 16 subspecies of Red-tailed Hawks have been recognized (Preston and Beane 1993); subspecies of the Great Plains tend to be the palest. In North America, five races are recognized: Eastern (*B. j. borealis*), Western (*B. j. calurus*), Harlan's (*B. j. harlani*), Fuertes (*B. j. fuertesi*) and Florida (*B. j. umbrinus*). Although plumage coloration intergrades occur among these races, the races exhibit recognizable coloration, and generally occupy geographically discrete ranges (Wheeler and Clark 1995).

Several sightings and specimens of color morphs or races of geographic variations have been reported from Florida (Table 1). Therefore, we recognize that geographic variation observed in Red-tailed Hawks is not easily assigned to diagnostic races. However, we observed a Red-tailed Hawk in Levy County, Florida, that displayed the "immaculate underparts" (Van Tyne and Sutton 1937) usually associated with Red-tailed Hawks from the region of Oklahoma, southwest Texas, and northeast Mexico (hereinafter referred to as *B. j. fuertesi*).

On 14 February 1996 at approximately 1615 along Route 24 in Levy County en route from Bronson to Gainesville, Florida, we observed a large, unusually pale hawk perched on a dead snag on the north side of the road. The hawk was buteo-shaped with a gleaming white breast; there was no band across the lower breast or upper belly as is usually seen in migrant or Florida Red-tailed Hawks (Howell 1932). The bird was perched about 45 m from the road and was facing west so that there was excellent afternoon light on its ventral surface. R. Norton studied the bird for nearly seven minutes using 8× Zeiss binoculars. (Weather conditions on that day were mild following an earlier period of cold weather from the west.) R. Norton observed the following field marks: upper belly lacking a band, flank streaks reduced to fine shaft lines ("a mere hair line along the shaft feather"; Van Tyne and Sutton 1937), thighs uniformly white, barring on tail much reduced, and the throat white. The plumage color of the bird's ventral surface was paler than any resident Florida Red-tailed Hawks either of us had seen. The head was a warm tawny-brown with white edges to the feathers. The face was brownish gray around the base of the bill and the eyes. The cere was yellow, and the bill appeared a little smaller than expected. The eyes were dark, the throat to breast was pure white, and the upper belly was without any streaks typical of birds of the southern Great Plains (Oklahoma and Texas; Wheeler and Clark 1995), thus eliminating other *Buteo* species such as the Ferruginous Hawk (*B. regalis*). The sides of the upper belly had warm brown or tawny shafts on three or four feathers close to the wing—a character which could not be seen with the naked eye. The underside of the tail was a light rufous-pink with a hint of a sub-terminal band.

As R. Norton exited the vehicle to see more of the back and tail, the hawk lifted off the snag, flew west, and dipped to show the typical red tail of an adult Red-tailed Hawk with

Table 1. Locations and dates of observations of out-of-range, non-breeding Red-tailed Hawks (*B. jamaicensis*) in Florida.

Race	Location	Date	Source ¹
<i>borealis</i> "krideri" (whitish morph)	Jefferson Co.	26 Dec. 1980	1, 9
	Leon Co.	2 Dec. 1994	2
	Leon Co.	2 Feb. 1995	2
	Leon Co.	29 No. 1995-Feb. 1996	3, 4
	Jefferson Co.	4 Jan.-20 Feb. 1996	4
<i>borealis</i> × <i>calurus</i> (intergrade)	Leon Co.	23 Dec. 1980	5, 10
<i>abieticola</i>	Brevard Co.	11 Mar. 1962	1, 5, 11
<i>harlani</i>	St. Lucie Co.	1 Jan. 1988	6
	St. Lucie Co.	16 Jan.-18 Mar. 1989	6
	Gulf Co.	14 No. 1991	3
<i>jamaicensis</i> (dark morph)	Dixie Co.	17 Mar. 1990	7
	Dade Co.	29 Dec. 1991	8

¹Sources: 1 = Robertson and Woolfenden (1992); 2 = West and Pranty (1995); 3 = Pranty (1996a); 4 = Pranty (1996b); 5 = Stevenson and Anderson (1994); 6 = Blackshaw and Polisse (1990); 7 = Cox (1990); 8 = Cox (1992); 9 = specimen (TTRS 3680); 10 = specimen (TTRS 3681); 11 = specimen (WFVZ 20580).

little dark barring other than a darker band near the end of the tail. The color of the dorsal surface of the tail was a brilliant reddish-pink. We watched the bird fly west across Route 24 until out of sight in pine trees. J. Ripple revisited the location within the week for additional observation and photographs, but was not successful.

Compared to other possible light morphs of *B. jamaicensis* illustrated in a recent photographic guide (Wheeler and Clark 1995) and described in Preston and Beane (1993), the palest race is *B. j. fuertesi* of Oklahoma, Texas, and northeast Mexico. Of all the light forms *B. j. fuertesi*, breeds closest to Florida. The hawk we observed most closely resembles photograph RT30 in Wheeler and Clark's (1995) guide, but had even finer streaks with no suggestion of barring. We believe we observed a bird of the *B. j. fuertesi* population and the first to be reported from Florida.

Recognizing that some of the coldest weather on record for many midwestern and southern states occurred in January 1996, it seems likely that *B. j. fuertesi* would leave its normal wintering range. If our identification is correct, this occurrence of *B. j. fuertesi* in Levy County, Florida, would fit an apparent pattern of dispersal to the Gulf coast by species that normally winter inland (McAtee et al. 1944, V. Remsen pers. comm.). A number of western bird species [e.g., Lesser Nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*), Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), Black-chinned (*Archilochus alexandri*) and Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) hummingbirds, Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), Scissor-tailed (*T. forficatus*) and Vermillion (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) flycatchers, and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)] appear in the Florida panhandle, north-central, and sometimes southern Florida. These occurrences of western bird species in Florida represent a taxonomically broad migration from the western United States to Florida (McAtee et al. 1945).

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