

SWAINSON'S HAWK IN WESTERN WASHINGTON
WITH A NOTE ON THE TYPE LOCALITY

BY J. W. SLIPP

THOUGH rare throughout the northwest coastal belt, Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is a generally common migrant and breeding species in the open country east of the Cascade Range. In the State of Washington, it occurs with some regularity as far west as the alpine meadows of the Cascades and Mount Rainier (Taylor and Shaw, 1927; Kitchin, 1939 a, b; Slipp, ms). The present paper is intended to review and supplement what little is known regarding occurrences of this hawk in the more western portions of the state, and to summarize what has been learned of the history of the type specimen with the aim of determining as truly as possible where it may actually have been collected.

Published records of Swainson's Hawk in western Washington are mostly of a dubious nature. Thus Dawson (Dawson and Bowles, 1909: 509) held that it was an uncommon migrant and resident "undoubtedly" breeding "about the open places" of western Washington, and later asserted (1923: 1690) that it wintered "irregularly northward to . . . western Washington"; but, in the earlier work at least, it was occasionally his practice to admit questionable evidence, and his treatment of other hawks, for example the two species of *Accipiter*, is misleading in the light of the experience of other ornithologists (cf. Bowles, 1930, for example). That his views on the status of *B. swainsoni* in western Washington were not shared by his locally more experienced colleague is evidenced by both prior and subsequent publications of the latter (Bowles, 1906; Bowles *et al.*, 1924; Bowles and Decker, 1934). With Dawson's statements as precedent, the listing in Bent (1937) of western Washington localities ("probably Tacoma . . . probably Bellingham") under "Breeding Range" is understandable, though quite certainly erroneous. Bent's early spring record for "Tacoma, April 27" may possibly have the same basis as Bowles and Decker's (1934) casual mention of only one record obtained in 37 years of field experience in western Washington, but what the original data may have been in either case seems now to be indeterminable (letters of F. R. Decker, A. C. Bent, F. C. Lincoln). On the other hand, Edson's (1908, 1919) representation of this species as a "Rare summer visitor" at Bellingham is explained by him as being based on the capture of a specimen in 1893 (see below), his subsequently having "seen several other mounted specimens [presumably taken] in this [Whatcom] county," and his

having identified the species "a number of times" in the field (Edson, letter of July 6, 1942).

Even sight records, specific as to date and place but lacking descriptive notes, can hardly be taken at face value, owing to the evident rarity of the species in this region, the difficulty of separating certain plumages of *swainsoni* from comparable ones of the common and similarly variable *B. jamaicensis*, and the misidentification of actual and supposed specimens of *swainsoni* in local collections. Accordingly a few unpublished field identifications now at hand are not here detailed. Two specific accounts already on record are by Rathbun (1902, a perched bird seen near Lake Washington, March 7, 1892) and Burleigh (1929, one in flight near Renton, Feb. 15, 1920).

With the possible exception of the type, known specimens of Swainson's Hawk from western Washington are only three. The earliest of these, an adult male taken May 10, 1893, at Bellingham by J. M. Edson, and now mounted in his collection (Edson, *in litt.*) has been reported by Rathbun (1927). Two previously unrecorded skins in local collections are as follows: (1) a heavily pigmented juvenal female taken September 24, 1935, at Westport, Grays Harbor County, by Stanton Warburton, and now in the D. E. Brown collection at the Washington State Museum; and (2) a yearling male in worn and faded plumage, shot in the first week of September, 1939, at the state game farm near Steilacoom, Pierce County, and now in the E. A. Kitchin collection at the College of Puget Sound. The Steilacoom specimen was frozen at the near-by fish hatchery for a month before it was shown to me by the men in charge, who recounted the circumstances and approximate date of its capture. In the following November it was prepared by Mr. Kitchin. The measurements are large for a male, and the coloration unusually pallid. The plumage everywhere is so worn and faded as to indicate a long-delayed molt (*cf.* Bent, 1937: 227).

Notes on the food habits of the three specimens are at hand. Edson (letter of July 6, 1940) found one tree toad (*Hyla regilla*) and a dozen grasshoppers in the stomach of the Bellingham specimen. A notation on the label of the Westport specimen states that the stomach contained part of a snake (very probably *Thamnophis* in this locality). The specimen taken at the Steilacoom game farm was allegedly killed in the act of attacking a Ring-necked Pheasant.

HISTORY OF THE TYPE

By most authorities, including the third edition of the A. O. U. Check-List (1910: 159), the type locality of Swainson's Hawk is given

as merely "Near the Columbia River," following the original statements of Audubon concerning the collection of the type specimen by J. K. Townsend. The fourth edition of the Check-List (1931: 68), however, adds the restriction "= Fort Vancouver, Washington," without explanation beyond notice in the preface (p. xi) of the adoption of a general policy of supplying such restrictions for "broad" type localities, "following some previous revisor where such has been found." It may be assumed that the late Dr. Witmer Stone, then chairman of the committee in charge of preparation of the fourth edition of the Check-List and an outstanding student of both Townsend's and Audubon's ornithological labors, either sponsored or approved the restriction; but an effort to discover a definite basis for the restriction, such as would certainly have been brought to light by Dr. Stone if not already a matter of accessible record, has failed. The conclusion is that "Fort Vancouver" was in all probability an arbitrary selection, made in conformity with the announced policy of the Check-List, and based on historical inference rather than any newly found source of information.

In view of the faulty nature of the published record regarding this hawk west of the Cascades, it would be easy for even the best of non-local ornithologists to fail to appreciate the improbability of this selection. Townsend, of course, did spend much of his time in the northwest at and near Fort Vancouver, but this fact alone is hardly a convincing reason for assuming that the type of *swainsoni* was taken there; and especially is this true in view of the rarity of this species west of the Cascades and the knowledge that Townsend also collected east of these mountains. As chairman of the A. O. U. Committee on Classification and Nomenclature, Dr. Alexander Wetmore writes of the Fort Vancouver restriction as follows (letter of June 13, 1941): "So far as I can ascertain this last was inserted by the late Dr. Witmer Stone . . . Dr. Stone I know made a considerable study of the travels of Townsend and undoubtedly had some reason for this indication. I believe, however, that in this he was in error since Swainson's hawk normally does not range west of the Cascade range." The question, then, is still an open one, and a review of what has been learned of the circumstances surrounding the collection and subsequent history of the type specimen may serve to clarify matters somewhat, and perhaps to prompt others to bring conclusive information to light.

The name *swainsoni* was applied originally by Bonaparte (1838) to the *Buteo vulgaris* of Audubon's elephant folio plate 372, pub-

lished in London in 1837. The plate shows an adult female in the 'normal' color phase in the act of capturing a Carolina marsh rabbit [*Sylvilagus p. palustris* (Bachman)] against a watery southern landscape. The rabbit, if not the setting, is apparently a reflection of conditions in the vicinity of Charleston, South Carolina, where, as the guest of Bachman, Audubon spent the winter of 1836-1837 "drawing the new birds of Townsend and Nuttall" (Herrick, vol. 2: 156, see also Bachman's (1837: 337) reference to Audubon's illustration of the "Marsh Hare," *Lepus palustris*, in plate 366 (*sic*), vol. 4, of the *Birds of America*).

Some insight into the genesis of the published plate has been obtained through the kindness of Donald A. Shelley, curator of paintings of the New York Historical Society. Comparing a microfilm of the original drawing (the collection of Audubon originals in possession of the Society was then in storage) with a reproduction of plate 372, he wrote (July 7, 1943) that "as regards composition . . . our drawing . . . shows the hawk and rabbit exactly as they appear in the Macmillan reproduction. As is frequently the case, however, the background stream, house, and trees, as well as the foliage at the lower left corner are entirely missing in the Audubon water color and were evidently added by the London engraver. The original water color shows also, at the lower left, a serpent-like animal [apparently the horned toad of Audubon's plate 386, judging from Mr. Shelley's sketch] which was omitted in the engraved plate . . . there is a faint drawing of a bird's wing directly beneath this animal . . . In the upper right corner there are faint pencil lines indicating branches of trees . . . As far as I can tell this is the only composition of this subject and the elements are all pictured on a single page. Other than the inscription in pencil 'dark water,' above inscription No. 5, I can find no instruction to the engraver." [The inscriptions distributed across the lower margin of the original sheet are as follows (order and punctuation approximate): "No. 77 / Plate 381 5. Horned Agama / Tapayaxin of Hernandes 1. Common Buzard, Female / *Buteo vulgaris* 2. Slate-colored Hawk, Male / 3. Female / *Falco velox*, Wils. 4. Marsh Hare, Female / *Lepus palustris* Bachman." Inscriptions 2 and 3 are not matched by figures on this sheet, but published plate 374 shows a pair of adult *Accipiter striatus velox*.] Further examination of the entire microfilm collection by Mr. Shelley failed to reveal any landscape composition related to that of plate 372 (letter of Sept. 8, 1943).

Whereabouts of the specimen from which the figure was taken are

unknown, no record having been made of it, apparently, since the original ones of Audubon and Townsend; and nowhere in the literature is there a satisfactory statement of the precise locality and date of its capture. Audubon (see below) places it near the Columbia River, and the history of the plate, together with the fact that it was late in 1837 before Audubon, then in London, learned of Townsend's arrival in Philadelphia with the remainder of his collections, makes it certain that the specimen must have been included in the first shipment of Townsend's birds to be returned to the east—that sent from Fort Vancouver in late September of 1835 and received in Philadelphia after being a year in transit. [See Audubon's letters to Edward Harris date-lined "London Oct. 26th., 1837" (Herrick, vol. 2: 170-173) and to Dr. Thomas M. Brewer (Brewer, 1880).] The failure of the Ornithological Committee of the Philadelphia Academy to mention this species in their list of specimens "worth particular notice" in Townsend's first shipment ("Townsend," 1837: 193) may have been due to faulty evaluation, oversight, or uncertainty regarding classification in this once difficult group.

Audubon's earliest recorded mention of the type of *swainsoni* is contained in a letter to William Swainson headed London, 11th January 1838 (Herrick, vol. 2: 176). Referring, apparently, to the specimen figured in his plate 372, Audubon wrote: "I certainly should like to see the *Buteo vulgaris* to compare it with mine (that [taken] at the mouth of the Columbia) and one described by Nuttall [*B. montanus* in ms.?] before the return from America of D. Richardson & of which it seems you were not aware.—I am glad nevertheless that if differing from the European bird of that name the Transatlantic bird will be honored by your own name." That the bird was taken at the actual *mouth* of the Columbia is doubtful, and Audubon does not repeat the assertion in his writings intended for publication. In view of the notorious unreliability of his casual accounts of historical and natural phenomena, the unlikelihood of this hawk occurring at the mouth of the Columbia, and Townsend's scant opportunity to obtain it there (*see* itinerary, below), this assertion need not be taken literally.

Audubon later, in the fourth volume of the 'Biography' (1838: 508) and volume one of the octavo 'Birds' (1840: 30), published accounts stating that the bird had been shot by Townsend near its nest on a rock near the Columbia River. Quoting from the latter source: "The specimen from which the figure before you was taken, was shot by Mr. Townsend on a rock near the Columbia River, on which it

had its nest. Unfortunately, however, he has not supplied me with any account of this species, and the only notice respecting its habits that I have seen, is that in the *Fauna Boreali-Americana* . . ." That Audubon had additional specimens at hand is indicated by the following (1840: 32): "Another specimen in my possession, procured by Mr. Townsend on the plains of Snake River, has the upper parts brown, streaked and spotted with reddish-white; the upper tail-coverts white, barred with dusky, the lower parts as above described. The colours, however, vary, and in some the upper parts are deep brown, the lower reddish or brownish-white, barred with reddish-brown" (cf. Ridgway, 1876: 35). It may be noted that Audubon's account of this species is not one of those to which Townsend is known to have taken exception (see Stone, 1906: 312); the list as presented by Stone is taken from marginal notations in the Philadelphia Academy's copy of volume 5 (only) of the *Biography*, and treats of only a few songsters.

The inferences to be drawn from the foregoing accounts of Audubon are inconclusive. Apparently he obtained at least two, and probably several, specimens of Swainson's Hawk (plus an unknown number of Red-tails) collected by Townsend on his journey to the northwest, two being labelled as collected on the Snake River plains and the Columbia River, respectively. Probably the latter, the type, also was designated a female, but if the date of collection was recorded, Audubon gives no indication of it. [Although the labelling of Townsend's specimens from the South Pacific was generally erratic and inadequate, this was not true of his earlier Pacific Northwest collection (see Stone, 1934).] That the type of *swainsoni* actually was taken from "a rock . . . on which it had its nest" is questionable, for this species nests by preference in trees, usually resorting to rock sites only when suitable trees are lacking; furthermore, Townsend was in the known breeding range of the species only in September, scarcely a likely breeding month, although there is on record an August egg date. [Bendire (1892: 238) and others record, as an extremely late date, the taking of a single egg of Swainson's Hawk "on St. Mary's River, Montana, on August 17, 1874." In the absence of a notation by its distinguished collector, Elliott Coues, the conclusion that this was an addled or abandoned egg does not seem justified.] Audubon states that no account of the habits of this species was supplied him by Townsend, which suggests that the circumstances of the capture may have been indicated on the specimen label, if not supplied *de novo* by the colorful artist-naturalist. As

Herrick remarks (vol. 1: 273-4): "Whenever Audubon went directly to nature to exercise his pencil or brush or wrote with his subject before him, he was truth itself, but in writing offhand and from memory of past events he was wont to humor his fancy." A further point to consider in striving to determine the season at which the subject of Audubon's plate was taken is that, with a selection of specimens at hand, Audubon would naturally select for illustration one in full, fresh plumage—that is, a fall specimen.

Possibly the bird was taken from the vicinity of a nest not its own, or no longer in use for more than roosting or perching purposes. In any event the mention of the rock is suggestive of the east-Cascades country, not the humid west side where tree sites are universally available and exposed rocks something of a rarity. Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) follow the A. O. U. Check-List (1931) in suggesting that the type of Swainson's Hawk was captured near Fort Vancouver, but Mr. Jewett reviews this stand unfavorably in a letter dated July 8, 1942: "Concerning the type locality of Swainson's Hawk, I have always doubted that this type was taken on or anywhere near Sauvies Island, or even Vancouver. There are no suitable rocks anywhere near either one of these localities, and not until you get up river 30 to 40 miles. However, below Sauvies Island on the Washington side not far below Longview there are some suitable rocks . . . If a hawk ever nested on Sauvies Island, it certainly nested in a willow or cottonwood tree."

The writings of Townsend shed little direct light on the problem, although "*Falco buteo*" is listed nominally in his three lists of Oregon birds (1836, 1839a, 1839b). The body of his journal makes no reference to it, but his itinerary, as outlined therein and supplemented by Hall (1937), may be reviewed in part, with an eye to evaluating his opportunities to obtain this bird on the Columbia. His party arrived at Fort Walla Walla on the 3rd, famished and tired, but were soon refreshed and on the following forenoon crossed "the river" (the mouth of the Walla Walla?) preparatory to starting down the left (*vide* Hall) bank of the Columbia on horseback on the morning of the 5th. Here the Columbia is bordered by a sandy flat backed by precipitous cliffs, the country being generally dry and treeless. The journey to The Dalles is scantily recorded. On the 9th the river bank became rocky and difficult, forcing the party inland repeatedly. Pushing on, they caught up with the main body of the expedition at a village twelve miles below The Dalles late in the afternoon of the 10th, whence they embarked in canoes on the following morning.

Hardships due to stormy weather and near disaster to both men and collections featured the trip downstream. On the 16th they arrived at Fort Vancouver, where Townsend employed himself through the fall in collecting in the vicinity of the fort, Warrior's Point on Wapatoo or Sauvies Island, and the lower Willamette River, on one occasion traveling as far up the latter stream as the falls. On December 2 they boarded a ship which the next day weighed anchor and started down the Columbia estuary on the first lap of a journey to the Hawaiian Islands. Stops were made at Coffin Rock on December 4, at some Indian villages on the north side of the river on December 6, and at Fort George (Astoria) on December 8. On the 9th they anchored in Baker's Bay, where Nuttall and Townsend went ashore and visited the ocean beach outside of Cape Disappointment. On the 11th they crossed the bar at the mouth of the Columbia. After a profitable winter's collecting they again approached the mouth of the Columbia on the 15th of April, 1835, entering and running as far up as Oak Point on the following day, and reaching the brig's old mooring ground at Warrior's Point on the 17th. From then until Nuttall's departure with Townsend's collection in late September of that same year, "they divided their time between Fort Vancouver and the 'Brig' stationed at the lower end of Sauvies Island near the lower mouth of the Willamette River, with numerous excursions into the adjacent country, and up the Willamette, each working his particular field" (Hall, 1937: 13). No exact record of their movements in the spring and summer of 1835 has been left, but this much may be deduced from scattered data. Townsend remained on the Columbia west of the Cascades during this entire period, although Nuttall was east of the mountains, in the vicinity of The Dalles, for some time prior to July 11, 1835.

In evaluating the foregoing, it is notable, first, that prior to shipment of his collection, Townsend's presence on the Columbia within the normal range of Swainson's Hawk was limited to a brief period in September, 1834; if he did not then obtain the specimen in question, he must at least have seen the species repeatedly. Too, the possibility that Nuttall, rather than Townsend, may actually have secured the specimen suggests itself, as Nuttall's itinerary provided additional opportunities, in the nesting season of 1835, to collect this species east of the Cascades, and it was he who supplied Audubon with Townsend's birds as well as those taken by himself. That Audubon may have attributed the specimen in question to the wrong person is not, however, bolstered by anything known to have been

written by either Townsend or Nuttall, and the number of birds collected by Nuttall was comparatively small as he was preoccupied with the collection of plants and "was not in the habit of carrying a gun" on his rambles. Presumably, too, the workmanship of any particular specimen might identify its collector where this was not designated by signature.

In summing up, an admission should be made that it is, of course, not impossible that a vagrant Swainson's Hawk may have been taken by Townsend on the lower Columbia in the spring of 1835, and it was perhaps this line of reasoning that led to the suggestion of Fort Vancouver as the restricted type locality; but objections to this are many, and in the absence of direct evidence the assumption appears unsound. It seems logical, on the other hand, to suppose that Townsend obtained his specimens of *Buteo swainsoni* (1) within the normal range of the species, and (2) at a time when weather conditions and a certain amount of leisure from other duties (*e. g.*, forced travel) would permit collecting operations. Reasoning thus, and attempting to rationalize the known biological and historical factors, including Audubon's nest-near-the-Columbia version, it is concluded that the type specimen was collected on the Columbia River, in all probability on September 4, 1834, near the mouth of the Walla Walla.

For the privilege of examining specimens and for helpful correspondence I wish to express my indebtedness to the following students of Washington ornithology: Mrs. Martha Reekie Flahaut (Washington State Museum), Mr. Stanley G. Jewett (U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service), Mr. E. A. Kitchin, Mr. J. M. Edson (Bellingham Public Museum Society), Mr. F. R. Decker, and Mr. Harold Hilton (formerly of the Washington State Game Department). The difficulties of working at a distance from the larger collections of reference materials have been reduced by the generous assistance of Dr. Alexander Wetmore (U. S. National Museum), Mr. Frederick C. Lincoln (U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service), Mr. Donald A. Shelley (New York Historical Society), Dr. Clifford Drury (San Francisco Theological Seminary), Dr. Charles M. B. Cadwalader (Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia), Dr. Harvey Fisher (University of California), and Dr. E. O. Holland (Washington State College). Dr. Alden H. Miller (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology) kindly read and criticized the manuscript.

Abstract:—Undoubted occurrences of *Buteo swainsoni* in Washington west of the Cascades and Mount Rainier are three: an adult male reported taken at Bellingham in May, 1893, and two previously

unrecorded September juveniles taken at Westport and Steilacoom in 1935 and 1939, respectively. The food habits of these three specimens are noted. A review of the history of the type specimen indicates that it was taken by J. K. Townsend on the Columbia River, quite probably on September 4, 1834, near the mouth of the Walla Walla River in southeastern Washington.

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ADDITIONS TO THE PUERTO RICAN AVIFAUNA WITH NOTES ON LITTLE-KNOWN SPECIES

BY VENTURA BARNÉS, JR.

Dichromanassa rufescens rufescens (Gmelin), REDDISH EGRET.—One male and one female were collected at Cartagena Lagoon, P. R., on August 24, 1943 (Ramos). These two specimens, now deposited in the Museum of Zoology of the College of Agriculture, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, were obtained by Sr. Ciprián Fantauzzi when he saw the birds feeding close to shore in the mud flats of the lagoon. He states that they were the only ones observed in that vicinity. This constitutes the first record of the occurrence of the Reddish Egret in Puerto Rico. Both specimens are in the dark phase. Wetmore and Swales (1931: 78) state that the species is apparently a rare resident in Haiti and the Dominican Republic; Bond (1936: 22) did not include it from Puerto Rico. Danforth (1936) never found this rare bird on the island.

Plegadis falcinellus falcinellus (Linnaeus), GLOSSY IBIS.—One male, testes rather large, Anegado Lagoon, P. R., January 9, 1941 (Biaggi). Later, on September 26, 1943, five birds were seen at Cartagena Lagoon by Prof. J. A. Ramos. Since December, 1935, when the first record of the species for Puerto Rico was secured (Barnés, 1936: 351),