

Ferruginous Hawk at Clinton Lake: first photo documentation for state

by Christopher L. Wood

On 25 November 2004, I went to Clinton Lake (DeWitt County) for a quick try at the Bohemian Waxwing (see Eric Walters' story and photo in this issue). I did somewhat better than before with this endeavor, this time at least finding a flock of some 70 Cedar Waxwings. Alas, I couldn't find any Bohemian Waxwing. There were also no unexpected or unusual loons, grebes, ducks or gulls on the lake. The most exciting birds were raptors along Highway 10. I stopped to look at a nice dark male Rough-legged Hawk, and as I was watching him, I noticed a distant bird well over a mile away. I almost dismissed it as a Turkey Vulture, but the wings appeared a bit long and the bird didn't rock much. I watched the bird keep coming toward me until eventually the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) flew directly overhead, and where I was able to get some nice photos. This was just east (1.3 miles) of Weldon. Then, just about 1.2 miles west of 1900 E I saw a very pale large raptor perched on a utility pole. At first I thought it was going to be another pale eastern Red-tailed Hawk, but as I got closer, I realized it was a Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*). As I was pulling over the bird took off, revealing all white feather tarsi (the first time I could tell it was a juvenile — I still hadn't seen it in my binocular or stopped the car). I hit the gas to get even with it and managed to get a few images as the bird flew north. By the time I was able to make a U-turn and get to 1900E the bird was out of sight. I assumed that it set down somewhere on 600 road, but I couldn't find it anywhere. I drove around for an hour or so, but never refound it in the area. Since pale Red-tailed Hawks (including



Top: Ferruginous Hawk. Clinton Lake, DeWitt County. 25 November 2004. Photo by Christopher L. Wood.

Bottom: Golden Eagle. Clinton Lake, DeWitt County 25. November 2004. Photo by Christopher L. Wood.

"Kriders") are frequently misidentified as Ferruginous Hawk and since these photos would be the kind I would use in a photo quiz, I draw your attention to the following: 1. The distinctive wing shape (long, pointed) 2. Pale underwing with very few markings (no hint of patagial mark) 3. Dark primary coverts (not white as in Red-tailed Hawks) contrasting with extensive pale patch in primaries 4. Dark secondary coverts and scapulars (would be much more white on "Kriders" and "normal" juvenile Red-tailed Hawks. 5. White uppertail coverts with dark spotting. 6. Rather dark tail (again, would have numerous white bands in "Kriders").

This is the only photo documentation for Ferruginous Hawk in the state. This species is known from Illinois from a 1939 specimen and four accepted sight reports. A female was found shot 21 April 1939 in Northfield Township, Cook County and the specimen is now at the Chicago Academy of Sciences (see Bohlen 1989). There is controversy over a supposed specimen, a male, collected by a Mr. Balmer at Paris in Edgar County 19 January 1886.

Due to the difficulty in identifying this species, other Illinois records have not been accepted. Bohlen (1989) states that many records of this species including several of my own should be considered erroneous because of confusion with "Kriders" Red-tailed Hawk." Bohlen (1986) invalidates his six records for this species and gives identification criteria to separate "Kriders" Red-tailed Hawk from Ferruginous Hawk.

Literature Cited

Bohlen, H.D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN. 221 pp.

Bohlen, H. D. 1986. The status of the Ferruginous Hawk in Illinois. Illinois Birds & Birding 2:40-41.

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