

# LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for. Attach additional pages or files as necessary. Please print or type for hard copy. For electronic copy, be sure to save this file to your computer before entering text. Attach field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed (if hard copy), mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216, or e-mail electronic copy as an attachment to Paul Edward Conover at <[zoiseaux@lusfiber.net](mailto:zoiseaux@lusfiber.net)> .

1. English and Scientific names: Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*)

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): one dark-morph adult

3. Parish: Jefferson Davis/Cameron

Specific Localities:

10 Dec.- first observation in rice fields in southern Jefferson Davis Parish about ¼ mi. east of Hwy. 99 about 1 mi. N of Hwy. 14; second observation in rice fields immediately south of Thornwell grain co-op complex (south of Hwy. 380, west of Potter Road).

13 Dec.- about 1 mi. SSW of Thornwell

14 Dec.- two observations: when bird appeared at rice harvest site at south end of Verba Williams Road, we were about 1 mile to the NW at Kevin Berken's farm and we could see the bird soaring to our SE over the vicinity of the harvest site; a short time later, we were north of Hwy. 14 and east of Hwy. 99 (in the general vicinity of the first encounter on 10 Dec. and 2-3 miles NW of the Verba Williams Road location) and we briefly saw the bird soaring high overhead.

15 Feb.- Cameron Prairie NWR headquarters

4. Date(s) when observed: 10 December 2014, 13 December 2014, 14 December 2014, 15 February 2015

5. Time(s) of day when observed:

10 Dec.- first set of intermittent observations at first location between 12:45-1:10; at second location, second set of observations between 1:45-2:00 PM, third set as a fly-by at

3:11 PM. Times based on camera EXIF file (we were riding the combine looking for rails not paying attention to the exact time).

13 Dec.- ?? early afternoon

14 Dec.- about 1:00 PM and again about 2 PM?

15 Feb.- about 4:00 PM?

6. Reporting observers and address: Donna L. Dittmann & Steven W. Cardiff

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): none

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): on 14 Dec. 2014, bird was first observed south of Hwy. 14 at south end of Verba Williams Road by Dave Patton, Mara Factor, Van Remsen, Mike Harvey, and later in the afternoon it was spotted along Hwy. 99 north of Hwy. 14 by Glenn Seeholzer, Cameron Rutt, and Stephanie Wheeler; from early Jan.-Feb. after bird was re-found by Van Remsen et al. at Cameron Prairie NWR HQ it was seen by numerous observers over at least a six week period.

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): varied, from OK to glary and dusty.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Leica trinovid 10 X 42's and through viewfinder of Nikon D300S (DLD); Leica ultravid 10 X 50's (SWC).

11. Distance to bird(s): varied; initially as close as 50-100 ft., but mostly more distant views of bird soaring. On 15 Feb., sitting in tree as close as 100 ft.

12. Duration of observation: about five minutes/day on four different days for a grand total of about 20 minutes over four encounters.

13. Habitat: on 10 Dec., 13 Dec., and 14 Dec. bird was associated with rice agriculture. On all three days the bird was attracted to active rice harvest operations and was obviously foraging for prey exposed by the rice combine as fields were cut. Cut fields had assortment of prey items including birds (rails, sparrows, wrens), mammals (rabbits, mice, and rats), and reptiles (garter snake). On 14 Dec., after initially appearing at a rice harvest site south of Hwy. 14, the bird was later spotted by two different parties (us and Seeholzer et al.) soaring high above the vicinity of the first location on 10 Dec. At the Cameron Prairie NWR site, the bird was sitting in leafless willow/tallow trees overlooking a weedy/marshy area.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and

stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

10 Dec.- Hawk was first observed sitting in cut rice on the north end of a rice field that was almost completely cut. DLD was inside cab of combine and saw the bird and thought it looked “interesting.” SWC was riding on the outside of the combine as it was moving and independently saw the bird naked-eye and thought it looked “interesting.” It sat in the same position as the combine made two complete passes of the field. At one point as the combine was passing the bird, it was startled and DLD saw it lift its wings briefly before settling back into the rice. On the next circuit around the field we were expecting the bird to still be sitting in the field and were intending to stop but the bird was gone. We did not see it flush, but then DLD spotted it in flight circling and it headed south with a Red-tailed Hawk. We got off the combine within 5 minutes and drove south looking for it but were unable to relocate it. Meanwhile, the combine moved NE to a new set of unharvested fields closer to Thornwell. We rejoined the combine and DLD soon spotted the FEHA again from the combine as it was attracted to the harvest activity. DLD got off the combine to get photos from the field – the hawk circled around the field for a few minutes then drifted southward out of sight. It was seen the third time as it made a fly-by past the combine – and headed south; it had a full crop (photos).

13 Dec.- We were riding on the combine at a harvest site about a mile south of Thornwell and the FEHA eventually appeared over the field. DLD got off the combine to photograph the bird, which soon disappeared.

14 Dec.- Bird initially seen by others when it appeared at a harvest site at south end of Verba Williams Road. The FEHA appeared toward the end of the harvest activity. We were notified by text message that it had been spotted. At the time, we were about a mile away to the northwest at the south end of the Kevin Berken Farm and we scanned to the southeast and DLD picked out the FEHA among other soaring raptors. Roughly an hour later, we were east of Hwy. 99 and about ½-1 mile N of Hwy. 14 and the FEHA was spotted by DLD soaring high and generally moving N. Sometime after that it was spotted by Seeholzer/Rutt/Wheeler somewhere along the Hwy. 99 corridor.

15 Feb.- We had just spent about 5 hours searching for the stake-out Eurasian Wigeon at the Pintail Loop and decided to stop at the Cameron Prairie NWR HQ to see if the FEHA was still around. We saw it immediately from the parking lot. It was sitting in a leafless willow directly west of the parking lot at the edge of a large marshy/weedy open area. We got fairly close in the vehicle and Donna took a few photos.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species; body bulk, shape, proportions; bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species, *or for species that are known to hybridize frequently, stress features that help eliminate possible hybrids*): DLD first spotted the distant dark hawk in northern section of the cut field when the combine stopped briefly – noting the blackish brown head and chocolate/rustier chest believing that it was most likely a western dark-morph Red-tailed. It is difficult to resolve detail from a moving combine

due to the vibration. However, when the combine passed the hawk DLD saw it briefly raise its wings and saw white primaries and secondaries contrasting with dark wing linings, perhaps even white on the tail but wasn't sure – so was eager to see the hawk on the next pass. As the combine came around past the hawk DLD snapped a couple of pictures in case it *was something 'good.'* Photo next page. SWC also saw the bird independently and noted that the face/gape pattern looked more like a Ferruginous Hawk.



The dark blackish brown head and rustier browner chest are apparent in the photos. We stopped the combine and DLD and SWC conferred on the hawk's ID on the outside of the combine landing: Steve noting that he thought he noticed a "smiling" wide gape with his naked eyes. (Although the photos above are poor through the windshield of the combine, the bird's overall coloration and the *wide yellow gape are obvious*). Meanwhile, the hawk had flown and was no longer sitting in the field. DLD spotted the distant bird



as it flew south and snapped another photo (left). In flight it was lankier and somewhat differently shaped than the nearby Red-tailed Hawk. The light was horrible, and the hawk more distant so details of the wings and especially the tail could not be seen well but we were convinced that it was a Ferruginous Hawk based on its overall shape – and review of photos confirmed the distinctive gape character. While SWC was moving the truck, DLD was back on the combine at the next set

of fields and spotted the hawk as it soared into and over the fields – wings were held in a slight dihedral reminiscent of a Turkey Vulture (or Ferruginous Hawk). DLD got off the combine and snapped several photos from the ground but the light was pretty horrible. She then tried to position herself south of the bird for better light. Best photos below - bird circled a few times then soared back to the south.





DLD didn't really study the bird and only looked at it a few times through her binoculars while trying to obtain photos. However, from the photos the identification is clear-cut based on the pattern of the under wing (unbanded primaries and secondaries), pale panel in the outer primaries of the upper wing, whitish tail with vague dark terminal band, dark dark under wing linings with white comma pattern. The hawk made a third appearance latter in the day – DLD first noted a dark hawk as it hover briefly over a very distant field and disappeared. But shortly thereafter a dark hawk made a fly-by past the combine and DLD obtained the next couple photos below. At that time neither observer (with their naked-eye views from the moving combine) was sure that it was the Ferruginous Hawk. It disappeared and did not return (note full crop in photo).



Same general characters were noted during DLD/SWC observations on 13 and 14 Dec. The bird was photographed much more extensively at much closer range at the rice harvest site on 14 Dec. (Patton et al.). When a dark-morph FEHA was observed and photographed at Cameron Prairie NWR in early January 2015, we compared the photos with those of the Thornwell bird and determined that it was the same individual based on plumage and molt. Photos by others also confirmed that the bird had feathered tarsi. During the SWC/DLD observation at Cameron Prairie NWR on 15 Feb., the bird was perched and we did not flush it. Photos show a large dark Buteo with the diagnostic gape character of a FEHA. The bird is determined to be an adult based on .....

16. Voice: not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Dark morph eastern and Harlan's Red-tailed and dark Rough-legged hawks do not share similar combination of structural and plumage characters.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): best embedded; others available.

19. Previous experience with this species: both observers have seen lots of light morph Ferruginous Hawks and a few dark morphs in western USA; we have also found 3 light morph individuals in southwest Louisiana, one sight record (Acadia Par.) and 2 photo-documented (both Cameron Par.).

20. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

a. at time of observation: NONE.

b. after observation: Looked at various hawk guides and internet photos after downloading DLD photos to compare and evaluate plumage/age.

21. This description is written from:

<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made during the observation.	Are notes attached?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	notes made after the observation.	At what date?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Memory		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	study of images		

22. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: YES

23. Date: 12 December 2014, revised 7 March 2015 to incorporate subsequent observations.

Time: 7 AM

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, may we include your name with the report? \_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_