

# 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: White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*)

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):  
One subadult/immature (specific age uncertain for me as I'm not familiar with the nuances of ageing this species).

3. Parish: Cameron Parish

Specific Locality: Sabine Pass, immediately east of the Texas/Louisiana border along Highway 82, where there is a pulloff on the north side of the road that allows for boat access and fishing on the Sabine River (29.7691, -93.8894).

4. Date(s) when observed: 26 March 2018 (<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S43999403>)

5. Time(s) of day when observed: 1:20 PM

6. Reporting observer and city/state address

Reporting observer: Cameron L. Rutt
City: Baton Rouge
State: Louisiana

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): At the time of initial observation, nobody identified the bird correctly. I misidentified the bird prior to the arrival of Tom Johnson and Melissa Roach, in part because I mis-aged the bird, thinking that it was an adult. I then misled the others in our crew upon their arrival, alerting them to the presence of what I thought was a light morph, adult "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk. It was only after photos were eventually uploaded to our eBird checklist that Brian Sullivan caught the mistake and corrected us.

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s): Only Brian Sullivan did remotely via our eBird documentation!

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): I don't recall the specifics, but lighting was reasonable when I first picked up on this *Buteo*, as I saw it flying low and then perched near the ground (~1 m up) in the marsh. This all took place mostly to the east of my vantage point, where the sun (if present) would have given three quarter lighting, though I suspect it was cloudy then. After Tom and Melissa arrived, the bird eventually took flight once more but drifted substantially to the north and west and gained some serious altitude, becoming largely backlit in the sunny, but mostly cloudy, sky.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Swarovski EL 8.5x42 binoculars, a Swarovski ST-80 scope with a 20-60x zoom eyepiece, and a Canon 7D Mark II with a 400mm f/5.6L

11. Distance to bird(s): Distant. It was closest when I first got on the bird, perhaps something on the order of 700-800 feet (~0.15 miles), but most of our subsequent looks in flight were much higher and farther than that. We eventually quit watching the bird through our scopes as the distance and backlighting became unsatisfactory.

12. Duration of observation: My sequence of pictures span ~18 minutes, though I think the bird was actually in view for longer than this, just in locations that were not easy to see the bird well (perched at long range and flying while backlit).

13. Habitat: Low coastal prairie and marsh with scattered trees. This location is also surrounded by a lot of water due to the close proximity of the Sabine River.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Flying low over the marsh/prairie, perched low in the marsh (though I can't quite make out what it was perched on, perhaps a fencepost or small tree?), and then soaring high above the landscape. One of the attached photos shows the bird flying with a moderately strong dihedral, a feature consistent with White-tailed Hawk.

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*):

Brian Sullivan identified the bird through pictures and so that is all that we have to go on at this point. The plumage of this bird doesn't match any illustration in Sibley, as it appears to be between a 2<sup>nd</sup> year bird and an adult (3<sup>rd</sup> year?). Upon review, a short series of rather poor photos show several features that match White-tailed Hawk and rule out any morph or subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk. This includes a rather unusual wing shape with long, pointed wingtips but bulging secondaries, a lack of a dark patagium, marbled pattern in the

underwing coverts, extensive bright white on the rump/uppertail coverts, and an otherwise pale gray or dingy tail with a dark terminal band. Amazingly, although it is difficult to discern, some photos even show some reddish on the lesser upperwing coverts (see, for example, WTHA-20180326-1E3B1811-CLRutt.jpg). In retrospect, it is fortunate that we at least took and uploaded a few reasonable pictures; otherwise, the rarity of this sighting would have been missed altogether.

16. Voice: Not heard vocalizing.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): See above under description for features that eliminate Red-tailed Hawk (the only other *Buteo* in North American that could show a mostly white/pale tail). Critically, wing shape, lack of the Red-tailed Hawk's dark patagium, and pale red "shoulders" clinch the identification for a subadult White-tailed Hawk.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Yes, by me (attached)

19. Previous experience with this species: I've seen this bird a number of times over the years, mostly in south Texas, but also in Central and South America. However, as I've often been traveling when I encountered this bird (and have usually seen adults), I still don't know this species very well.

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

a. at time of observation: None

b. after observation: Sibley Guide to Birds and Hawks at a Distance (Ligouri 2011)

21. This description is written from:

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

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

23. Date: 17 January 2019

Time: 8:00 PM

24. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

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



Cameron Rutt





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