

## Status and Occurrence of Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin.

### Introduction and Distribution

The Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) is an elegant raptor that is found throughout North America (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This species breeds in deciduous or mixed-wood forests containing shade-tolerant hardwood trees close to wetland areas in eastern North America, and is a year round resident in some areas and a migratory one in other regions (Dykstra *et al.* 2008). The migratory eastern population breeds from New Brunswick, across southern Quebec, southern Ontario to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Vermont, and Maine (Dykstra *et al.* 2008). The rest of the eastern range of the Red-shouldered Hawk that is non-migratory starts from New Hampshire, south to Florida and west to Texas, north from eastern Oklahoma, eastern Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois (Dykstra *et al.* 2008). In the winter, Red-shouldered Hawks from the eastern population winter south to Jalisco, a state of México, and Veracruz, Mexico (Howell and Webb 2010). Along the west coast of North America, the Red-shouldered Hawk population is non-migratory and breeds from south-western Oregon, south throughout California, into Baja Mexico with birds wandering into Nevada, Arizona and into Washington State during the winter months (Dykstra *et al.* 2008). There are four recognized subspecies of Red-shouldered Hawk with the nominate subspecies (*B. l. lineatus*) which is found in eastern North America from southern Canada to the central United States (Clements *et al.* 2016). Another subspecies of Red-shouldered Hawk is (*B. l. texanus*) found in southern Texas to southeastern Mexico to Veracruz, and is often combined by most authorities with (*B. l. alleni*) which is found in south-central Texas to South Carolina and northern Florida (Wheeler 2003a, Clements *et al.* 2016). The smallest and palest form of Red-shouldered Hawk belongs to the subspecies (*B. l. extimus*) that is found in Florida and the Florida Keys (Clements *et al.* 2016). The most colourful and a more isolated population of Red-shouldered Hawk is the western subspecies (*B. l. elegans*) that is found from south-western Oregon to northern Baja California (Clements *et al.* 2016).

In British Columbia, the Red-shouldered Hawk is an accidental species with only a handful of provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The Red-shouldered Hawk is also accidental in Idaho (Carlisle *et al.* 2007) and Manitoba (Sibley 2000). There are no records for Saskatchewan (Sibley 2000), Alberta (Hudon *et al.* 2014), Yukon (Sinclair *et al.* 2003) or Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2013).

### Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Red-shouldered Hawk is covered in all standard field guides for North America. The discussion on how to identify the various subspecies is often covered in some

detail as well. All birds that have been found in British Columbia are assumed to be the California subspecies (*B. l. elegans*) (Wheeler 2003a). The identification of this subspecies will be the focus of this account. It should be noted that in northern Idaho, the nominate subspecies (*B. l. lineatus*) has been banded at Lucky Peak, Banding Station in Ada County, Idaho, which is in the southern portion of the state near Boise (Carlisle *et al.* 2007). The Red-shouldered Hawk is a medium sized raptor measuring 43 cm with a wingspan of 101 cm, and weighing 630 grams (Sibley 2000). The Western subspecies of Red-shouldered Hawk is much different looking than the slightly smaller Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) which measures 38 cm with a wingspan of 86 cm, and weighs 390 grams (Sibley 2000). The eastern Red-shouldered Hawk immatures can look similar to immature Broad-winged Hawk, and keen observers should read Wheeler (2003a) for detailed information. A western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) measures 48 cm with a wingspan of 124 cm, and weighs 1,080 grams. The Red-shouldered Hawk is classified in the Buteo family, but is rather compact, stocky, and Accipiter-like with relatively short wings; and at all ages shows a translucent pale crescent in the primary shafts (Sibley 2000).

The following detailed description of Red-shouldered Hawk is taken from Wheeler (2003a).

Adult birds' heads are very colourful with tawny-rufous and dark brown streaking on the crown and nape, and can appear golden coloured. The malar is ill defined and often grayish. The breast is always solid dark rufous. There is dark rufous barring on the belly, flanks, and leg feathers that are bold. The underparts lack thin dark shaft streaking. White or pale tawny undertail coverts have broad rufous bars. The back and wings are black with white edges to the feathers. This gives this species a checkered look. The wings have a distinct rufous shoulder patch. In flight, there is a distinct white crescent at the base of the primary feathers. In flight, the undersides of the wings have rich rufous axillaries with black and white bars in the secondaries and primaries with a white crescent that is obvious at the base of the primaries. The tail is long and has bold black bars with narrow white bars in between. On flying birds with a spread tail, there are four to five white bands that can be seen with a white tail band on the outer tail tip. The legs and feet are yellow.

Juvenile and immature birds have a dark rufous or tawny-brown head with a paler supercilium and auricular areas. The throat is dark brown. The underparts are white and are covered with dark brown markings. The breast can vary in feather patterns. Some birds show broad, distinct heart or arrowhead-shaped markings that may expand into partial barring. The breast of some birds can show distinct streaking. The flanks are broadly barred and the belly is covered with small dark blotches or arrowheads. The leg feathers are thinly barred with brown or rufous-brown. The undertail coverts are white with broad rufous-brown barring. The back is brown

with irregular shaped white blotches on the base of the scapulars. The wings have a distinct rufous shoulder patch that shows more on this subspecies than on others, but note it can be hard to see on perched birds. There is distinct white barring on the secondaries and greater upperwing coverts with white edging and spotting on the first two rows of lesser upperwing coverts. The base of the primaries has white spots that create an obvious white crescent. The undersides of the wings have dark rufous axillaries with black and white barring on the secondaries and primaries. The translucent white crescent is obvious at the base of the primary feathers. The tail is medium to dark gray with narrow white bands. When the tail is closed on sitting birds, there is only one white band generally visible. On flying birds with a spread tail, there are four white bands that can be seen with no obvious white tail band on the outer tail tip. The legs and feet are yellow.

The Red-shouldered Hawk is a very vocal species, with distinct, far-carrying calls (Sibley 2000). The adult territorial call is a high, clear, squealing “*keeyuur keeyuur*” often repeated steadily (Sibley 2000). This call can be imitated by the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) and the Steller’s Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) (Sibley 2000). The Red-shouldered Hawk also gives a single, slow or slowly repeated high, sharp “*kilt*” (Sibley 2000). California birds may give a bit shorter, higher, and sharper call than eastern and Florida birds (Sibley 2000). Juvenile birds give a similar call like that of the adult (Sibley 2000).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Red-shouldered Hawk is an accidental vagrant species to British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). There are three Provincial records and five records that are hypothetical, but are likely correct (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). Birds found in British Columbia so far are presumed to be of the California subspecies (*B. l. elegans*) which is much brighter overall and more striking in plumage features than the Eastern subspecies (*B. l. lineatus*) (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). This is the most likely subspecies to occur in British Columbia (Wheeler 2003a). Since 1971, this subspecies of Red-shouldered Hawk’s overall population in southwestern Oregon has increased (Henny and Cornely 1985) and, as a result, this species has expanded its range northward for several decades with more and more records occurring in Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005). This species has been increasing in both number and frequency in Washington State since 1992 with the early records confined to the Columbia River basin, but has since spread north along the western region of the state with records from the interior in the eastern part of the state as well (Wahl *et al.* 2005). Since 1992, the Red-shouldered Hawk has been recorded annually as a rare species with over 40 accepted records by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2014). It was removed as a review species by the Washington Bird Records Committee in 2008 (WBRC 2014). The Red-shouldered Hawk has appeared throughout the year in Washington State with numbers of

records from all seasons, including many records during the winter months (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2014).

The first record for British Columbia was found by Ian Cruickshank and Ronald Melcer Jr. at Rocky Point Bird Observatory in Metchosin as it was flying with other migrating raptors, and was independently found a short time later nearby at East Sooke Park by Rick Toochin on September 17, 2009 (Cruickshank and Melcer 2010, Charlesworth 2010a, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The bird was reported to have been briefly found the next day near East Sooke Park (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The second Provincial record was of an adult bird found flying low with migrating Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), 3 Red-tailed Hawks, and two adult Broad-winged Hawks in Sumas Prairie on September 21, 2015 (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). Poor quality pictures were obtained but not good enough for publication (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The third Provincial record was of an immature bird found migrating, at first on its own, then later joining a flock of Turkey Vultures in Sumas Prairie on October 13, 2015 (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). After being found, the bird rose quickly on a thermal and photos were obtained of which one is identifiable (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). This represents the first photographed record of this species for British Columbia. Of the three confirmed records found in British Columbia so far, all three have occurred during the fall peak period of raptor migration in southwest British Columbia (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.).

Older records are likely correct, including a published report from Chilliwack (Brooks 1917) and a report of an adult bird in Hope, but unfortunately they both lack details (Thacker 1948). There is also one report from Vancouver Island (Bowling 1998c) and two recent reports from the interior that sound intriguing, including one bird that had distant photographs which were inconclusive (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1).

It seems almost a certainty that there will be future records in British Columbia as the Red-shouldered Hawk continues to spread northward in Washington State. Keen observers should watch for this species in hawk migration which starts in British Columbia in the Spring in mid-February and lasts till early May, and in the Fall from late August to early November. There is also a good chance this species could occur in the province during winter months. As with all accidental species, photographs and confirmation is highly recommended whenever possible.



Figure 1: Red-shouldered Hawk immature in Sacramento, California on February 11, 2013.  
Photo © Michael Ashbee <http://www.mikeashbeephotography.com/>.

**Table 1: Records of Red-shouldered Hawk for British Columbia:**

- 1.(1) adult September 17-18, 2009: Ian Cruickshank and Ronald Melcer Jr. & Rick Toochin, mobs: RPBO, Metchosin & East Sooke Area (Cruickshank and Melcer 2010, Charlesworth 2010a, Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 2.(1) adult September 21, 2015: Rick Toochin: Marion Road, Sumas Prairie (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 3.(1) immature October 13, 2015: Rick Toochin (photo) Cole Road, Sumas Prairie (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)

Hypothetical Records:

- 1.(1) [age unknown: no dates given] Allan Brooks: Chilliwack sight records (Brooks 1917, Campbell *et al.* 1990b, Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 2.(1) adult June 8, 1948: T. L. Thatcher : Little Mountain, Hope (Thacker 1948, Campbell *et al.* 1990b, Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 3.(1) adult May 4, 1998: Peter van Kerkoerle: Cassidy (Bowling 1998c)
- 4.(1) adult May 18, 2011: Barry Lancaster : few kilometers short of 70 Mile House (Toochin *et al.* 2014)

5.(1) sub-adult? June 28, 2011: James Bradley (photo: not conclusive) Valemount  
(Toochin *et al.* 2014)

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