

December's **At a Glance** photo gives us a dorsal view of a large, perched hawk, as seen from behind and below. Fortunately, the bird's head is turned, thus providing a profile that suggests that the bird is in the genus *Buteo*. A falcon would exhibit a rounded cranial appearance, whereas an accipiter would appear longer necked and smaller headed, especially in proportion to what is an obviously substantial body and a short tail. A Northern Harrier in this posture would plainly show its unique facial disks, a feature that would give the bird a flat-faced appearance.

Knowing that the bird is a *Buteo* narrows the possibilities considerably. Concentrating on the tail at this point, we can plainly see a distinct terminal band of white feather tips with a thin, dark subterminal band above the white tips. The rest of the tail is narrowly banded with dusky stripes. The fact that the tail is not uniformly colored suggests that the bird is not an adult Red-tailed Hawk. Likewise, the absence of a white or whitish base and a broad, dark subterminal band eliminates the Rough-legged Hawk. The lack of white bands, either broad or narrow, eliminates the adult Broad-winged and Red-shouldered hawks.

The remaining visible feature that best indicates the proper identification of the hawk is the conspicuous white edging to the scapulars, which produces a strikingly mottled appearance to the upperparts. When this feature is coupled with the obvious bulk of the bird and the rather stubby many-banded tail, the identity of the bird as an immature Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is assured. None of the other Massachusetts buteos regularly combine these features in any plumage. The Red-tailed Hawk in the picture was photographed on Nantucket.

Wayne R. Petersen



Red-tailed Hawk

Photo by Roger Everett

AT A GLANCE _____

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.



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