

# First Harlan's Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) for Baja California Sur

**Steven Mlodinow**

4819 Gardner Avenue  
Everett, Washington 98203  
(email: sgmlod@aol.com)

**Roberto Carmona**

**Luis Sauma**

**Georgina Brabata**

Universidad Autonoma de Baja California Sur  
Departamento de Biología Marina  
A.P. 19-B  
La Paz, Baja California Sur 23080 Mexico  
(email: beauty@uabcs.mx)

## Abstract

This paper documents the first record of Harlan's Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) for Baja California Sur, apparently only the second record for Mexico, and reviews the range of *harlani* in North America, including Mexico.

## Field Encounter

On 24 January 2003, Brabata and Sauma found a Harlan's Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) in Chametla, near La Paz, Baja California Sur. Unaware of the earlier sighting, Mlodinow located the same bird at that location on 28 January and obtained videotape of the bird on that date and on 31 January. This bird was last seen 10 March by Carmona. The hawk frequented a partly flooded pasture adjacent to five wastewater oxidation ponds, each of them 5 ha in size. This wet pasture, the adjoining oxidation ponds, and a collector tank 15 km away, are the only freshwater bodies within 100 km (Castillo-Guerrero et al. 2002) in a region that is quite arid, averaging only 200 mm of annual rainfall (García 1964). The hawk spent much of its

time perching on large trees bordering the pasture area, occasionally making soaring forays over the flooded short-grass field (in which cows and goats grazed). It was never observed taking prey.

The following description is from notes taken by Mlodinow and the videotape. The hawk's body was entirely blackish (no brownish hue), excepting several uneven longitudinal white streaks on the upper chest. The upperwing was solid blackish. The underwing coverts were entirely blackish. The undersurface of the flight feathers appeared whitish with a dark trailing edge to the secondaries and primaries that included the outer primary tips; no barring was observed in these whitish areas. The remiges' tips appeared solidly dark in the field (but may have borne fine pale barring on the outer primaries). Seen from below, the rectrices were off-white with a fairly distinct dark terminal band. Dorsally, the rectrices appeared dusty gray with a dark terminal band that was less distinctly demarcated than in ventral aspect. With closest views, the dark of the terminal band continued onto each rectrix, forming fine, dark longitudinal stripes on the dusty gray tail—markings very similar to those shown in Clark and Wheeler (2001; p. 223) and Wheeler and Clark (1995; p. 88). Observers were not able to eliminate the possibility of a very thin pale terminal band on the tail, although none was observed. The plumage showed no hint of rust or reddish. The cere was yellow, the bill dark. Leg color was not noted. On the perched bird, the wingtips fell noticeably short of the tail tip, extending about 80 per cent of the way down the tail. The black body plumage, white chest streaking, and tail pattern eliminate all other *Buteo* hawks, including other subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk. The lack of brownish hues on the body and reddish/rusty hues on the tail argue against intergradation with other *B. jamaicensis* subspecies. Videotape footage of this bird is archived at the San Diego Museum of Natural History.

## Distribution and Vagrancy

Harlan's Hawk breeds sparsely throughout much of interior Alaska, southern Alaska,

the Yukon, and northernmost British Columbia, and its core wintering range stretches from southwestern Iowa, through eastern Kansas, western Missouri, Oklahoma, and western Arkansas (Wheeler 2003a). Smaller numbers winter in eastern Texas, Louisiana, and in isolated scattered pockets throughout much of the remainder of the western United States and southwestern British Columbia (Wheeler 2003a). This subspecies is, however, quite scarce in southern California and southwestern Arizona. Unitt (1984) lists no records for San Diego County, and G. McCaskie (*in litt.*) knows of none since. There are four records for Orange County (Hamilton and Willick 1996, Collins and Bloom 2000), five records from the California portion of the Salton Sink (Patten et al. 2003), two records for Inyo County (T. Heindel, pers. comm.), and four records (possibly involving the same individual) from the Lower Colorado River valley (Rosenberg et al. 1991). All of these reports involve dark-morph Harlan's Hawks; the light morph is relatively rare.

Given the relatively long migration route of Harlan's Hawk, it is not surprising that vagrants have been reported as far east as New Jersey, Virginia, and Florida (Wheeler 2003b). Prior to 2003, however, there appears to be only one known Mexican report: a bird seen at Mexicali, Baja California, 1–15 December 1994 (Patten et al. 2001). Harlan's Hawks have not yet been recorded in Tamaulipas, despite several records of this subspecies from the Texas portion of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the presence of apparently suitable habitat on the Mexican side (Howell and Webb 1995, B. K. Wheeler, *in litt.*). Likewise, Harlan's Hawk winters regularly in small numbers in southeastern Arizona (Wheeler 2003a), but it has not been recorded in the neighboring state of Sonora (Russell and Monson 1998) or elsewhere in northern Mexico (H. Gómez de Silva, *in litt.*). The dearth of reports from the southernmost United States and northern Mexico may indicate genuine scarcity or, perhaps, a lack of awareness of field characters that reliably separate the cryptic *harlani* from similar taxa of *Buteo*. Chametla lies 1050 km to the south-south-

west of the nearest previous record at Mexicali. Observers who visit the Baja California Peninsula and other parts of Mexico should attend carefully to the dark *Buteo* hawks, so that the status of Harlan's Hawk at the southern extreme of its range becomes clearer.

#### Acknowledgments

We thank Brian K. Wheeler, Héctor Gómez de Silva, Guy McCaskie, Tom Heindel, and Brian Sullivan for contributions to this paper.

#### Literature cited

- Castillo-Guerrero, J. A., E. M. Zamora-Orozco, and R. Carmona. 2002. Aves anidantes en dos cuerpos dualcecuicolas artificiales adyacentes a la ciudad de La Paz, B.C.S., Mexico. *Hidrobiologica* 12: 85-87.
- Clark, W. S., and B. K. Wheeler. 2001. *Hawks of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Collins, C. T., and P. H. Bloom. 2000. The status of Harlan's Hawk in southern California. *Western Birds* 200-202.
- García, E. 1964. *Modificaciones al sistema de clasificación climática de Koeppen (para adaptarla) a las condiciones de la República Mexicana*. Instituto de Geografía, UNAM, Mexico.
- Hamilton, R. A., and D. R. Willick. 1996. *The Birds of Orange County*. Sea and Sage Press, Irvine, California.
- Howell, S. N. G., and S. Webb. 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.
- Patten, M. A., G. McCaskie, and P. Unitt. 2003. *Birds of the Salton Sea*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- Patten, M. A., E. Mellink, H. Gómez de Silva, and T. E. Wurster. 2001. Status and taxonomy of the Colorado Desert avifauna of Baja California. *Monographs Field Ornithology* 3: 29-63.
- Rosenberg, K. V., R. D. Ohmart, W. C. Hunter, and B. W. Anderson. 1991. *Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona.
- Russell, S. M., and G. Monson. 1998. *The Birds of Sonora*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona.
- Unitt, P. 1984. *The Birds of San Diego County*. San Diego Natural History Society, San Diego, California.
- Wheeler, B. K. 2003a. *Raptors of Western North America*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- . 2003b. *Raptors of Eastern North America*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Wheeler, B. K., and W. S. Clark. 1995. *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Academic Press, London. 🌿

# The Friends of *North American Birds*

SUPPORT THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT  
OF *NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS*,  
THE ABA'S JOURNAL OF  
ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORD

Since its inception, the fund has allowed for many improvements to the journal's look and feel. The journal is now mailed in a protective wrapper to insure its delivery in one piece. The content has benefited from an increase in page count which has allowed for additional articles with even more detailed analysis. The amount of color pages has increased which has allowed for expanded Pictorial Highlights and an occasional Photo Salon.

**All of this has been made possible  
with your generous contributions.**

There are more plans in the works for future issues but the fund does need your continued support. To become a "Friend of NAB", simply donate \$50 or more. Each "Friend of NAB" will be recognized annually in the first issue of each volume of *North American Birds*.

Send donations to:  
The Friends of NAB, ABA,  
P.O. Box 6599  
Colorado Springs, CO 80934-6599