

**FIRST RECORD OF SHORT-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo brachyurus*)  
FOR ALABAMA****Lucy R. Duncan and Robert A. Duncan**

On 15 October 2003 at 0850 hours, the authors, Betsy Tetlow, and Cecil Brown had just driven past the ferry landing at Ft. Morgan, Baldwin County, Alabama, when Lucy saw a dark buteo swoop over the road (Fig. 1; Duncan and Duncan 2004). We observed the bird for an hour or so as it flew back and forth along the end of the peninsula, at times high along with Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*), and at times descending and disappearing behind brush as if after prey. It exhibited a noticeable dihedral at all times, eliminating most of the common buteos that pass through the area. Peggy Baker and Ann Miller also saw the bird. The following day, 16 October, Bill Summerour with Dick and Linda Reynolds observed the same features noted the previous day.

We observed a bright yellow bill with dark tip and unfeathered yellow legs and feet. The hawk's head and face were black. The entire underside of the body, including undertail coverts, was black with the exception of sparse, white flecks across the center of the belly. Its upper wings were jet black with no white showing anywhere. The underwings were distinctly checkered dark and light, with outer primaries black-tipped, and the trailing edges of the secondaries darker than the primary edges. The rump was all black, lacking any white whatsoever. The upper tail was solid black, its underside narrowly barred a light silvery-gray. It lacked a bold sub-terminal band.

Our tentative conclusion that it was a Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*) was erroneous. Questions left some lingering doubts, so Lucy Duncan's photographs were sent to hawk experts Brian K. Wheeler and William S. Clark, who agreed unequivocally and independently of one another that it was a "previously undescribed plumage" dark morph juvenile Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*). Their identification was based on wing shape, barring on the underside of the remiges, black outer primaries, and other features (pers. comm.). The bird closely matched the Short-tailed Hawk featured on plate 252 of Wheeler's *Raptors of Eastern North America* (Wheeler 2003).

The closest regular occurrence of the species is in peninsula Florida where it is a very uncommon resident (Wheeler 2003). It breeds as far north as Dixie and Putnam counties. In winter it retreats to the southern one third of the state (Wheeler 2003). There are specimen records from Wakulla County in the Big

Bend area of Florida, and a sight record as close as Holmes County, Florida by Thomas A. Imhof 4 June 1988 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Dark morphs comprise about 75% of the Florida population (Wheeler 2003). Widespread in the tropics, the Short-tailed Hawk occurs only as close as central Sinaloa and Tamaulipas in Mexico. Light morphs are more common in eastern Mexico and dark morphs slightly more so in western Mexico (Howell and Webb 1999). It also occurs on the Yucatan Peninsula. It is accidental in south and south-central Texas (Lasley 1991) and southeastern Arizona (Rosenburg and Witzeman 1998). There are no records for Louisiana (B. Mac Myers, pers. comm.). The origin of the Ft. Morgan bird is purely speculative, though it is highly probable of Florida provenance, especially as it was a dark morph. The weather on 15 October was clear with NNE winds 15 – 20 mph. The bird was present with Broad-winged Hawks that were moving west down the peninsula. The observation was submitted to the Alabama Bird Records Committee (04-92) and was accepted as the first record of this species for the state.



FIGURE 1. Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*), a new species for Alabama. Photographed by Lucy Duncan on 15 October 2003 in Baldwin County.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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