

Christmas Bird Count

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**CBC RARE BIRD DOCUMENTATION FORM**

Submitted as documentation of (check all that apply):

☒ Unusual Species    ☐ Unusual Date    ☐ Unusual Habitat

- ***MOST IMPORTANT:*** On back of form give complete details of this observation. Use additional sheets as needed. Include information on the bird's plumage, shape, size, vocalizations, habitat, behavior, etc. Describe exactly what you saw; include photocopies of your original notes and sketches. Name the species that you considered ID contenders; explain how you eliminated them. (see attached, below)
- **Count Name:** Los Alamos      **Count Code:** NMLS
- **Species:** Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's)    **Age:** Adult    **Sex:** unknown    **#** 1

**4. Date(s) of Observation:** 12/19/2015    **Time:** multiple sightings between 9:15 and 9:45

**Earlier/Later dates by others, if known:** A HRLH was seen two days later by Bob Loy about 6 miles east of the original location. There was another sighting a month previous in Bandelier. The only other report for this sub-species within the count circle was a single report in January of 2013 by a non-local birder using a generic "Los Alamos" location.

**5. Place:** Upper Los Alamos Canyon, about 1 km west of West Rd. on the dirt road leading to the reservoir.  
**Nearest Town:** Los Alamos      **County:** Los Alamos

**6. Observer:** Mouser Williams  
**Address:** 128 Rover Blvd., White Rock, NM  
**Telephone/E-mail:** 505-850-6670    mouser@mouser.org

**7. Observation Details:**

**Other Observers:** Kurt Miller, Mark Bjorkland, Nicola Winch, and Jonathan Creel  
**Optics Used:** Nikon Monarch-7 8x42 binoculars, Canon 7D Mk II camera w/ 400mm f/5.6L lens.  
**Distance From Bird:** 25m at closest approach    **Viewing Conditions:** Bright clouds behind, otherwise good.  
**Weather, sky cover:** light overcast clouds, no precipitation, no wind.  
**Photo Taken?** Yes    **Video?** No    **Sound Recording?** No    **Specimen?** No  
**Are these available to the CBC Regional Editor?** Yes    **Where are they?** Attached below

**8. Past Experience: With this or similar species?** This was my first sighting of a HRLH. I have lots of experience with typical "southwestern" RTHA which this obviously was not. I have limited experience with "western" RTHA whose dark morph is similar to HRLH. I have plenty of experience with ZTHA and very little with RLHA.

**9. References or Advice Consulted:** Kurt Miller, who was observing the bird at the same time and is very familiar with this sub-species, confirmed the ID. Afterwards, my photos were compared against Sibley's 2nd Edition and assorted online sources for backup.

**10. Was this report done from notes made during or after observation or from memory?** Memory and photographs taken during initial observation.

**Signature****Date** 12/25/2015

Observers please give this form to your compiler. Compilers please send all rare bird forms directly to your regional editor. Contact information for regional editors can be found at: <http://birds.audubon.org/programs/cbc/cbc-regional-editors> or in the latest CBC issue of *American Birds* on-line under Regional Summaries, sign up at: <http://www.audubon.org/citizenscience>. UPLOAD your CBC PHOTOS to the website at: <http://www.audubon.org/mediaset/cbc-photo-contest> and then email them directly to your regional editor along with this form.

**Any questions e-mail us at:** [cbcadmin@audubon.org](mailto:cbcadmin@audubon.org)

**Observation Details**

Bird was initially seen from behind while perched in a snag about 20m up and 30m away. Bird's apparent size and shape were consistent with RTHA, but it was conspicuously dark--almost black in appearance. Initially I chalked this up to being a dark bird against white clouds and assumed this was a very dark-morph western RTHA. At the time I didn't know to look at the relative lengths of the wing tips and tail when perched, but photos taken during this time clearly show the wing tips stopping well short of the tail (see Figure 2, below). After about 30 seconds of perching, the bird took flight and flew above me at reasonably close range (~25m closest approach, see Figure 1, below) then down canyon and perched in a distant snag. During the flyover I could see the underwing coloration was different than I have experienced for a RTHA. The primaries and secondaries were white with thin black stripes and a thicker black terminal band. Coverts and scapulars appeared solid black. The underside of the body from throat to the undertail coverts was all black save for some white spotting on the breast. Tail feathers were solid white with a diffuse dark terminal band. Feet yellow. Some yellow in the cere. Wing shape in flight consistent with RTHA. The bird did not vocalize. Habitat was a 200m-deep steep-walled canyon with ponderosa forest at the bottom. Southwestern RTHA are common at this location.

Southwestern RTHA and light- and intermediate-morph Western RTHA were ruled out by the underside plumage. Dark-morph Western RTHA adult was ruled out by the total lack of red in the tail (top and bottom) and by the wing tips not extending to the end of the tail when perched. Dark-morph Western RTHA juvenile was ruled out by the lack of any striping in the white tail and by the wing tips not extending to the end of the tail when perched. RLHA was ruled out by the lack of a thin white terminal stripe beyond the dark terminal bands in the wings and tail and also by the wing shape in flight. ZTHA was ruled out by the lack of striping in the tail and by wing shape in flight.

Figure 1: HRLH in flight. Note lack of stripes on underside of tail and dark terminal bands on wings and tail with no hint of white terminal stripe beyond the dark band.

Figure 2: HRLH perched. I've pushed the exposure on this image to bring out details in the wingtips; the bird appears more brown here than it looked in real life. I've also annotated the outlines of the wing tips and tail (in yellow) to emphasize the fact that the tail sticks out past the wing tips by a fair amount.