

What is *Buteo ventralis*?

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Charles Darwin, while on his famous Beagle voyage, collected a specimen of a previously undescribed buzzard in 1835 in southern Argentina. This was described by Gould in 1837 as Buteo ventralis, the Rufous-tailed Buzzard. In the 148 years since, there have been relatively few additional specimens collected, few sightings recorded, and only two nests described. The sparse literature on this species is contradictory as regards its status, habitat preferences and colour morphs. Some authorities have questioned whether it is even a full species.

This paper summarizes the status and distribution of this species, based on the available literature, specimen records and sight records, and discusses its similarity with Buteo jamaicensis, the Red-tailed Hawk of North America.

Distribution. I have examined 10 immature specimens in six museums, as listed in Table 1. They come from four distinct areas, El Bolson and Santa Cruz in Argentina, and Villarrica and Maquehue in Chile. Bud Anderson (pers. comm.) found a road-killed immature in the Chilean portion of Tierra del Fuego in December 1971. Michel Sallaberry photographed an adult male specimen that was collected in Lautero, Cautin province, Chile on 9 June, 1946. Phillippi (1964) mentions an immature collected near Pichidangui, Coquimbo province, Chile in March, 1961. Additional specimen records include 10 collected by Landbeck in 1859 (Housse 1945). Six of these are in the Museo del Instituto Aleman in Valdivia and four are in the Museo Nacional de Santiago. Housse (1945) also mentions three more immature specimens collected near Capitan Pastene, Malleco province, Chile in 1924 (1) and 1933 (2). David Ellis (pers. comm.) told me that an Argentine, Senor Kovacs (who collected the specimens from El Bolson mentioned above), has 5-10 more specimens of this species, all collected in the vicinity of El Bolson.

Wetmore (1926) does not mention Buteo ventralis. Humphrey et al. (1970) mention three sight records from the north-western part of Tierra del Fuego. Phillippi (1964) and Blake (1977) give the range for the Rufous-tailed Buzzard as the south of Argentina (Rio Negro and Santa Cruz) and, in Chile, from Nuble south to Tierra del Fuego. The distribution map for this buzzard given in Brown and Amadon (1968) includes the southern third of the mountainous border between Chile and Argentina, while that in Blake (1977) covers the entire southern third of these countries.

Status. Humphrey et al. (1970) give the status of *B. ventralis* on Isla Grande as hypothetical, as there are no specimen records from there, only three sight records. None of these authors saw this species during their

extensive field work on the island. Apparently Goodall et al. (1951) only saw one individual in the wild. Venegas and Jory (1979) state that it is fairly scarce in the province of Magallenes and should be looked at carefully to avoid confusion with B. polyosoma. Ellis (pers. comm.) has not seen this buzzard in the wild on any of his three field expeditions through southern South America. Ridgely (pers. comm.), in all his travels in southern South America, has seen this species only once. That was an adult soaring over a wooded forest in Las Alerces National Park, west of Esquel.

Habitat. Blake (1977) lists the habitat preferred by this species as chiefly forest. But Venegas and Jory (1979) and Humphrey et al. (1970) state that it is encountered in open country. Anderson (pers. comm.) found his immature specimen in dense evergreen beech forest (Nothofagus sp.).

Nests. Two nests mentioned by Goodall et al. (1951) were near Capitan Pastene and Nuble. They were in a Chilean Oak and a Lurelia aromatica and both were over 30 m above the ground. Three chicks were collected at one nest along with the adult female. The eggs of Buteo ventralis have not been described.

Dark morph. Housse (1945) mentions one dark morph Buteo ventralis collected by Landbeck. There are no other references to any dark specimens and a single reference to a dark bird being one of a pair nesting near Capitan Patene (Housse 1945). A dark morph specimen in the AMNH labelled Buteo ventralis was actually B. polyosoma.

Taxonomy. The Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum (1874) lists the type specimen collected by Darwin under Buteo borealis, a synonym for Buteo jamaicensis, the Red-tailed Hawk. Swann (1922) also included B. ventralis under B. jamaicensis. In a footnote, Hellmayr and Connover (1949) say: "A very puzzling bird is the hawk described by Gould as Buteo ventralis. In addition to the type (Reg. No. 55.12.19.204) collected by Darwin at Santa Cruz, the B.M. has a female secured by D. S. Bullock on April 14, 1906, at Maquehue, Temuco, Chile. They are very much alike.... The two birds bear a remarkable likeness to the immature stage of B.j. costaricensis".

Housse (1974) mentions that Phillippi sent an immature specimen of this species to Alexander Wetmore, who identified it as Buteo jamaicensis.

The 10 immature specimens of B. ventralis that I examined were all very much alike and virtually identical to immature specimens of B. jamaicensis, particularly some that were collected in Alaska. The dead bird found by Anderson and the mounted bird shown in Housse (1945) are likewise identical. The adult specimen photographed by Sallaberry and the adult shown in Housse (1945) appear remarkably similar to adult B. j. calurus, the western Red-tailed Hawk. David Ellis gave me a slide of Senor Kovacs holding an adult specimen of B. ventralis. The slide also shows a mounted immature specimen; again, both were essentially identical to B. jamaicensis.

After inspecting the two B. ventralis specimens in the Los Angeles County Museum, I placed them on a table randomly mixed with two immature specimens of B. jamaicensis. I hid the labels and asked the collection manager, Kimball Garrett, to identify the birds and discuss differences between them. He answered that they were all immature B. jamaicensis and were essentially identical in plumage.

Summary

Little is known about the status, distribution, colour morphs, habitat preferences and behaviour of *Buteo ventralis*. Its eggs have not been described. Additionally, the taxonomic position of this species, especially in relation to *B. jamaicensis*, needs to be clarified. Field work in South America is clearly needed. Some recently developed techniques used to compare genetic and protein similarities among individuals of closely-related species and subspecies may allow insight into the closeness of these two species.

Table 1. *Buteo ventralis* specimens.

Museum	Number	Age	Sex	Date	Location
Am Mus NH	648878	Imm	F	23 Jan 1944	Villarrica, Chile
Am Mus NH	781888	Imm	M	18 Jul 1959	El Bolson, Arg.
USNM	400056	Imm	M	29 Jul 1943	Villarrica, Chile
USNM	400057	Imm	F	5 Feb 1944	Villarrica, Chile
La Co. M.	56760	Imm	M	11 May 1961	El Bolson, Arg.
La Co. M.	33980	Imm	M	23 Jul 1959	El Bolson, Arg.
Brit. M. 55/12/19/204		Imm	U	3 Oct 1835	Santa Cruz, Arg.
Brit. M. 1908/11/9/10		Imm	F	14 Apr 1906	Maquehue, Chile
Peabody M.	9008	Imm	M	6 Jul 1943	Villarrica, Chile
LSU M.	69925	Imm	M	1 Jun 1971	El Bolson, Arg.

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