

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ABNKC19060

Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Buteo brachyurus*

COMMON NAME: Short-tailed Hawk, Little Black Hawk, Short-tailed Buzzard, Aguillilla cola corta [Spanish]

SYNONYMS:

FAMILY: Accipitridae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: Vieillot. 1816. Nouv. Dict. Hist. Nat., nouv. Ed., vol. 4. Pp: 477.

TYPE LOCALITY: (No locality given = Cayenne), AOU 1957.

TYPE SPECIMEN:

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: According to NatureServe, "suggestions that *B. albigula* of South American Andes and *B. brachyurus* are conspecific require confirmation (AOU 1983). Some accounts name three subspecies: *B.b. fuliginous* (North American and coastal populations), *B.b. brachyurus* (South American population), and *B.b. albigula* (Andean populations above 2100 m)."

DESCRIPTION: A small, stocky, crow-sized hawk, between 13-14 in (33-36 cm) long, with two color phases. The light phase is dark above and white below, with a dark face and white chin, and dark secondaries. There is a rusty-brown tinge to the sides just under the shoulder of the wing. The dark phase (more common in Florida) is black above and below except for the light bases of the primaries; the wing lining is dark gray-brown. In the dark phase, only the tail, wings, white forehead and nape are as in the normal (light) phase. The two phases interbreed but do not produce intergrades. Both phases have a banded, black and white tail, yellow cere, yellow legs and feet, and brown eyes. The tail is short, broad, with 3 dark bands. They have broad rounded wings that reach the end of the tail at rest; wings 35 in (89 cm). The wingtips are held upwards, like a Turkey Vulture, while soaring. In both morphs, key differences between adult and juvenile birds are size and appearance of the tail. Juveniles have proportionately longer tails with more numerous (7 or 8) bands visible; each band is approximately the same width, lacking the wider darker sub terminal band of the adult. Juvenile light morphs have a streaked face, and may have a tawny, buffy, or orange-buffy, feather edges throughout the breast, belly, and under tail coverts. Juvenile dark morphs have under parts mottled with small white spots to larger white streaks. Females are larger than males.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: In the field the small size, the sharply contrasting upper and lower surfaces (in the normal light phase), and if visible, the narrow white front at the base of the bill are good pointers of this species. The adult differs from other southeastern hawks by being either all black or all white below (throat, breast, belly and wing linings). The dark morph is similar to other dark buteos but the secondaries are darker than the primaries. In addition, at rest, other buteos wingtips do not reach to the end of the tail. Also, the dark morph Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) has evenly light flight feathers, while the dark morph Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) has evenly dark flight feathers. The light-morph immature resembles immature broad-winged hawk and may not be separable in the field. This species aerial hunting behavior is also distinguishing. It is often seen hanging in the wind high overhead, and when it spots likely prey, it makes spectacular dives or "stoops" into the open forest.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Color photo (Kevin T. Karlson, in <http://www.enature.com/fieldguide/>)
Color global distribution map (In http://131.220.109.5/groms/Species_HTMLs/Print_HTMLs/Bbrachyu_Print.html)
Color drawing (Sibley 2000)
Color photo (In http://a1410.g.akamai.net/f/1410/1633/7d/209.133.64.45/birds/birds_l/BD0093_11.jpg)
Color photo (Shepard in <http://www.mangoverde.com/birdsound/images/00000008887.jpg>)
Color photo (Dubois in <http://www.mangoverde.com/birdsound/images/00000003052.jpg>)
Color photo of both color morphs (Miller 2002)
Line drawings (U.S. National Parks Service, in <http://www.neartica.com/birds/hawks/Bbrachy>)
Color photo of light phase (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in <http://www.neartica.com/birds/hawks/Bbrachy.htm>)

TOTAL RANGE: Florida (main population), Texas (reported in spring and summer from 2001-2004), and Arizona (spring and summer), to the southern lowlands of Mexico, including much of the Yucatan Peninsula and coastal plains as far north as southern Sinaloa and Tampico. Central America lowlands on both coasts, Honduras, Costa Rica. Tropical and subtropical regions of South America, generally west of Andes in Columbia and Ecuador, Venezuela, Trinidad, Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Rare spring and summer visitor in southeastern Arizona; gone by early fall (late September to early October). According to Troy Corman (Pers. Comm. 2/14/2005), adults with juveniles have been observed at Barefoot Park in the Chiricahua Mountains. He also states that they have been reported from the Santa Catalina and Santa Rita Mountains in Pima County, but have not been confirmed. In 1999, 2 birds (a dark morph and a light morph) were observed in the Huachuca Mountains. There are also 3 sight reports during the summer in the Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains. Nine sightings of this hawk from 1985-

2003 (Arizona Bird Committee, accessed 2005). As indicated above, they are probably breeding in the State, however, more extensive surveys need to be conducted to determine their status.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: A rare and secretive hawk, that hunts primarily by sitting on a perch near or over water (especially in Florida), and darting out after its prey. This species aerial hunting behavior is also distinguishing. It is often seen hanging in the wind high overhead, and when it spots likely prey, it makes spectacular dives or “stoops” into the open forest. They perch until conditions are suitable for effortless soaring; it may spend much of the remainder of the day in the air. Aerial activity ceases 1-2 hours before sunset. Their call is a single high-pitched squeal, *kleeaaaa*, dropping in pitch at the end. In Mexico, the call is a ‘clear two-syllable whistle’. The call is half-way between that of the Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), and the Broad-winged Hawk. The short-tailed hawk also gives cackling calls. The high-pitched scream is often made continuously when humans are near the nest, however, they are usually silent away from the nest.

REPRODUCTION: Nest building in Florida is from February to April with the eggs being laid between mid-March to mid-April. The clutch size is usually 2. The eggs are short sub-elliptical to oval, 53 x 43 mm, smooth and non-glossy. They are bluish-white to dull white, or with a buffish wash; unmarked or with sparse speckling or scattered scrawls or spots in pale buff or brown; or heavy irregular spotting and blotching of dark brown, often concentrated at one end. The nestlings are semi-altricial and downy, with the down being white. Incubation lasts about 5 weeks and is performed by the female with the male providing food. Both parents tend the young. The young fledge at 4 to 5 weeks of age.

The short-tailed hawk nests in the top of a cypress, pine or other tree, or in the top of a mangrove. They nest in dense or open stands of tall trees in either flooded or upland location, in tall straight trees near edge of, or at small clearings in woodlands or near tops of trees taller than surrounding canopy, usually at fork along major trunk or larger lateral branch. They build new nests each year or, less often, reuses nest in successive years. The nest is a large stick cup that is lined with finer twigs, Spanish moss and green leaves, about 24-36 inches across and 6-12 inches deep (rather large for its small size); nests are usually situated 40-100 feet above the ground in the topmost branches of the nest tree. Fresh twigs with leaves are added during incubation and brooding. Generally, the male gathers the material and the female arranges it.

FOOD HABITS: Carnivore, invertivore. A specialized hunter of small birds, mostly warbler to mourning dove size. Small rodents, lizards, snakes, tree frogs, and insects have also been recorded. Hunts over forest canopy, along woodland edges, and well out over adjacent marshes, rough pastures, or prairies. They often search the ground from a nearly stationary position in midair.

HABITAT: Generally occupies open country, from mangrove and cypress swamps to open pine-oak woodland, avoiding heavily forested situations. Most common in mixed woodland-savanna habitats. In Mexico, it frequents pine-oak ridges up to about 6,500 feet.

ELEVATION: 410 - 6,562 ft (125-2,000 m)

PLANT COMMUNITY: Mangrove to cypress swamps to open pine-oak woodland. Most common in mixed woodland-savanna communities.

POPULATION TRENDS: Unknown. Very little information on status, especially outside the U.S but they are considered uncommon to rare. The population in the United States is very small with 300-400 birds concentrated mainly in the southern part of Florida. According to Troy Corman (Pers. Comm. 2/14/2005), adults with juveniles have been observed at Barefoot Park in the Chiricahua Mountains. He also states that they have been reported from the Santa Catalina and Santa Rita mountains in Pima County, but have not been confirmed. In 1999, 2 birds (a dark morph and a light morph) were observed in the Huachuca Mountains. There are also 3 sight reports during the summer in the Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains. Nine sightings of this hawk from 1985-2003 (Arizona Bird Committee, accessed 2005)

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None
STATE STATUS: None
OTHER STATUS: None

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: In northern and central Florida, logging has altered nesting habitat.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: This species is protected under Florida's state wildlife rules and Federal Migratory Birds Treaty.

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Investigate ecology and determine habitat requirements and limiting factors. Surveys need to be performed to determine range and status in Arizona.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: In Florida: FWS - Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, and Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge; NPS - Everglades National Park, and Big Cypress National Preserve. In Arizona: possibly USFS – Coronado National Forest.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Contrary to its name, the Short-tailed Hawk possesses a tail of average length for its body size among its congeners.

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