

SPECIES OF THE MONTH**NORTHERN HARRIER (MELANISTIC)****JANUARY 2024**

A melanistic Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) was reported 10 December 2023 at the Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park, Cochise County, during the weekly bird walk coordinated by local birders. It was reported again at the same location on 17 and 24 December. The bird was dark chocolate brown with the only light color showing on the underside of the primaries and tail with a bit peeking through on the top of the primaries. It had the facial disc of a harrier, but rather than the typical wide white rump band it had just a pale edge.

Northern Harrier has no subspecies and no plumage variants other than those differentiating males and females. Melanism, which results from an excess of the dark pigment melanin in the feathers, is very rare in birds, and only 4 or 5 reports of this mutation have been previously reported in Northern Harrier (Liguori, J. 2013. [Raptor Identification and Photography: May 2013 \(jerryliguori.blogspot.com\)](#)). This is the first record in Arizona, where the Northern Harrier is a common winter visitor.



24 December 2023. Photo by Steven Tracey

ABOUT SPECIES OF THE MONTH

Beginning last month, we are featuring a **Species of the Month**. These will include excellent-quality photos of state and county rarities, birds out of habitat, species of conservation concern, hybrids, and unusually plumaged birds.