

**SPECIES OF THE MONTH****SHORT-TAILED HAWK**

OCTOBER 2024



Short-tailed Hawk, Mt. Ord, 13 August 2024. Photo by Robert Bowker

The Short-tailed Hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*) was first reported in Arizona in 1985 in the Chiricahua Mountains (Cochise County). In the following 20 years it was a rare visitor to the Chiricahua and Huachuca mountains. The species was then detected farther north in the Santa Rita (Pima/Santa Cruz counties), Santa Catalina (Pima County), and Pinal (Gila County) mountains. Nesting was first documented in the Chiricahua Mountains in 2007. It first appeared on the annual Tubac Hawk Watch along the Santa Cruz River in March 2014. By 2017 reports of more than 50 individuals led the Arizona Bird Committee to remove the Short-tailed Hawk from its review species list. It has now been reported from 7 counties, most recently in Maricopa County, 13 to 31 August 2024.

The Short-tailed Hawk ranges from northern Mexico to northern Argentina and southern Brazil. In the United States it is the rarest and least studied *Buteo* and is primarily reported as a migrant in Arizona, Florida, and Texas, with the oldest records from Florida. In Arizona, migrants typically arrive in March and leave in September. One bird overwintered in Tucson between 2008 and 2011.

Slightly larger than the Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*), the Short-tailed Hawk is one of the smaller *Buteos* (Length 41 cm; Wingspan 94 cm). A forest raptor, it principally feeds on small birds perched on the tops of shrubs or trees. It captures prey by steep dives from soaring or hanging positions. Dives are typically high-speed stoops with folded wings.

Like many other *Buteos*, the Short-tailed Hawk has light and dark plumage variants. In Florida most are dark whereas in Arizona most are light. The dark variant is almost entirely blackish brown except for a small patch of white feathers on the forehead. Underwing coverts are dark except the under secondary and primary coverts, which are mottled with white. In the light variant, the head is dark blackish brown, and the chin and throat are white, creating a dark "hood". The upper parts are chocolate colored. The underparts are creamy white to immaculate white and unmarked, except for small patches of rufous brown on both sides of the upper breast. Underwing coverts are white and unmarked, secondaries are dark, and the trailing edges of the wings are dark. The tail is grayish brown above and grayish white below, with a dark terminal band.