

Recent Records of the Swainson's Hawk in Trinidad and Tobago

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On the afternoon of 22 March 1990, we discovered a Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) on Little Tobago Island, Tobago. We first detected an overhead *Buteo* while watching peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) chase red-billed tropicbirds (*Phaethon aethereus*) at a tropicbird colony on the northeastern edge of the island. As the single bird soared above us at about 20 meters, we were able to discern the telltale brown upper-breast and dark flight feathers of an adult, light-phase Swainson's hawk. The hawk circled over us for 5 minutes and then soared off northward. During that time we were able to scrutinize the bird further.

The wide wings, relatively short tail, and soaring style of flight indicated a *Buteo*. The brown upper breast was separated from the bill by a light area on the throat. The breast and abdomen were virtually unstreaked. The dark primaries and secondaries, darkening more at their tips, contrasted with the light wing lining. The tail was barred by 5-7 bands.

All of us were familiar with the species and had observed it numerous times in western North America. The coloured upper-breast ruled out the possibility of the bird being either a white-tailed hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*) or short-tailed hawk (*Buteo badius*). The light underparts and wing lining, contrasting with dark flight feathers, eliminated the broad-winged hawk (*Buteo*

platypterus) and the roadside hawk (*Buteo magnirostris*). Consulting Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps (*A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA, 1978), we found that no morphologically similar species occurred in northern South America.

Although large numbers of broad-winged hawks have been recorded off northeastern Tobago during spring migration (Rowlett, p. 214 in D.S. Heintzelman, *The Migrations of Hawks*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, USA, 1986), the Swainson's hawk was unknown from Trinidad or Tobago until 1989 (R. French, *A guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, Harwood Books, Newton Square, PA, USA, 1980). Because the entire Swainson's hawk population migrates from Argentinean wintering grounds to North American breeding grounds through the isthmus of Panama, occasional strays might be expected in northern South America and the Lesser Antilles.

The first record of a Swainson's hawk for Trinidad and Tobago also occurred on Little Tobago Island. Davis Finch recorded a single bird on 27 January 1989 (R. French pers. comm.). Our observation on Little Tobago Island represents the second record for the Swainson's hawk in Trinidad and Tobago.