



Photo Quiz

By Jon Ruddy

Even before beginning to analyze plumage detail, we can narrow our list of possibilities down to a few suspects...

Photo by Nicole Watson

YOU'RE OUT WITH FRIENDS ENJOYING a hike on a beautiful, sunny winter's day. Upon cresting a small hill, one of your friends stops dead in her tracks in front of you. As she stands there with her mouth ajar and eyes wide like saucers, you trace her gaze to a large brown bird perched in tree along the forest edge...

Looking at this bird's large, hooked bill and broad, powerful-looking shoulders, it becomes immediately apparent that our quiz bird is a solidly built diurnal raptor. In this clear, unobstructed view, we can see that our quiz bird is perched perfectly erect, affording an excellent view of its structural features and relative proportions. A bird perched in such a way is unlikely to belie the true length of its wings relative to its tail length, as might occur with a bird perched horizontally with its tail drooping below its body. Structurally speaking, the bird is sound and we are ready to investigate further its plumage, features and proportions.

Even before beginning to analyze plumage detail, we can narrow our list of possibilities down to a few suspects by relying heavily on GISS (General Impression of Size and Shape).

The proportionately short wings and very long tail immediately eliminate large members of the falcon family. In this posture, Gyrfalcon, Peregrine Falcon and Prairie Falcon would show long, dagger-like wing tips tending to fall equal to (Peregrine) or nearly equal to (Gyrfalcon and Prairie Falcon) the tip of the tail. The smaller falcons, Merlin and American Kestrel, are easily eliminated on the basis of the sheer bulk of our quiz bird. Both of the smaller falcons are rather dainty in build with proportionately large heads. American Kestrels of either sex are highly colorful and intricately patterned birds and Merlins are generally solid in tone throughout the upperparts and showcase pale barring atop a dark tail.

Compared to our quiz bird, a brown (female/juvenile) Northern Harrier would showcase a lengthy, lean visage; a long wing-fold extending down toward the tip of the tail; and an owl-like facial disk.

Both immature Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles have a massive bill with a staggering, hooked tip; they are both massive and long-bodied; and both species have long wings that would extend down toward the tail tip in a similar posture as to our quiz

bird. Osprey is immediately eliminated on the basis of wing fold length relative to tail tip and our quiz bird showcases an absence of the whitish head with a dark post-ocular stripe seen with Osprey.

Again using the unique 'signature' of short wings and very long tail seen on our quiz bird, we can examine the possibility of our quiz bird being a *buteo*. Broad-winged Hawks are quite stout in build, with a relatively large head, short body and much shorter tail than what is seen with our quiz bird. Swainson's Hawk and Rough-legged Hawk are much longer-winged, with both species also showing proportionately "lighter" bills. Is it possible that our bird is a Red-shouldered or Red-tailed Hawk? Adults of both species have striking, brightly-coloured plumage characteristics that our brownish quiz bird lacks. So, perhaps our quiz bird is a juvenile of either of the two species. Juvenile Red-tailed Hawks would show a proportionally shorter tail and longer wings; vague V-shaped pale mottling to the upperparts; and finer, more abundant tail banding. Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawks would show pale mottling throughout the upperparts, such as our quiz bird, but would also

keep with the *buteo* theme of proportionately longer wings and shorter tail. Note: juvenile Red-shouldered Hawks generally have quite a long tail as far as *Buteos* go, so we're getting warmer but still not quite there.

This leaves us with the accipiters: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk and Northern Goshawk. We can see by the brownish color overall, pale mottling throughout the upperparts and dull yellow iris that our bird is a juvenile of one of the three species of Ontario accipiter. The accipiters are characterized by short, relatively rounded wings and proportionally long tails. Starting with Sharp-shinned Hawk, we see that our quiz bird lacks the 'bug-eyed' look of a Sharp-shinned and the small, domed head; stocky build; and proportionally small bill which is typical of this species.

Moving along, we will now focus on Cooper's Hawk as a possibility, which our quiz bird may very well be. With Cooper's, typically the head and nape are heavily-streaked and tinged with a varying intensity of tawny tone throughout. The supercilium (eyebrow) is typically reduced to a dash of whitish feathering though in some birds it is quite well-defined. The upperparts are typically mottled with a modest degree of pale spotting.

These described features fit our bird quite well but something is amiss. A close look at the tail bands reveals several strikes against Cooper's Hawk. Firstly, the tail bands on our quiz bird are relatively thin, wavy and nearly disjunct in orientation. Typically, Cooper's Hawks have straight-lined tail bands which average broader than what is seen with our bird. Secondly, the tail bands are bordered by a light buff-toned edge; a feature that is not seen on juvenile Cooper's Hawks' tails. The tail pattern is a diagnostic feature for Northern Goshawk. Many of the other features, including size, are subjective and postural.

From the tail to studying the upperparts on our quiz bird, we can see the rather extensive whitish-buff spangling throughout, a patterning which is especially true of the upperwing coverts, seen here along the visible folded wing. Cooper's Hawks generally have less spangling throughout and typically lack the conspicuous pale mottling along the upperwing of juvenile goshawks. Visually stepping back from plumage detail all together and admiring the bird in its entirety, we conclude, after careful deduction, that our quiz bird is a juvenile **Northern Goshawk**. This juvenile Northern Goshawk was photographed in Kingston in Lemoine's Point Conservation Area by Nicole Watson on 25 November 2015.

Welcome to our new Photo Quiz editor



Michael Runtz. From 2012-2014, he worked as a field biologist, conducting bird surveys in southern Ontario, southern James Bay, throughout Manitoba and the southern portion of the Okanagan Valley. In 2015, he started up his own birding tours company, Eastern Ontario Birding, and loves nothing more than sharing birding experiences with others.

Jon is very active with the Ontario Birds Facebook group where he provides excellent advice on improving one's identification skills. His favorite bird species is the Yellow-throated Vireo.

OUR SINCERE THANKS GOES TO WILLIE D'ANNA for his dedication and expertise as author of OFO's Photo Quiz for the past six years. Willie both challenged us and educated us on how to observe and identify difficult species.

We anticipate that this well deserved break will enable Willie to spend more time with some of his favourite pastimes, birding and photography. We wish Willie all the best and anticipate that he will turn up another mega-rarity such as the Ancient Murrelet he discovered at Port Weller on 13 November 1994.

PLEASE WELCOME JON RUDDY who has agreed to take on the responsibility of writing the *OFO News* Photo Quiz. Jon is an Ottawa-based field birder/freelance birding guide and became interested in birds while studying under the tutelage of Carleton University professor and naturalist,



OFO News

Editor

Garth Riley
rileygv@yahoo.com

Contributing Editors

Mike Burrell
mike.burrell.on@gmail.com
Jon Ruddy, Photo Quiz
eontbird@gmail.com
Christian Friis
friis.christian@gmail.com
Allen Woodliffe
awoodliffe@hotmail.com
Cindy Cartwright
pom@bmts.com

Editorial Assistants

Geoff Carpentier, Jean Iron,
and Ron Pittaway

OFO News Layout and Design

Judie Shore judieshore@bell.net

Articles and notes are welcome. Contributors should check the OFO website under publications for deadlines and submission guidelines.

OFO Website www.ofo.ca

Doug Woods, Coordinator
Email: ofo@ofo.ca

Ontbirds

Mark Cranford – Coordinator
Ontbirds, with over 3000 subscribers, is OFO's successful listserv for reporting rare bird sightings. Now the largest birding listserv in North America, *Ontbirds* has become an integral part of the Ontario birding community. Follow the instructions on the OFO website to subscribe to *Ontbirds*.
Email: ontbirds@ofo.ca

OFO Membership

Annual membership: Canada: \$35.00
For information please contact the OFO Membership Secretary, Mark Cranford: membership@ofo.ca or check our website: www.ofo.ca

Return undelivered mail to:

Ontario Field Ornithologists
PO Box 116 Station F
Toronto ON M4Y 2L4

© OFO Pileated Woodpecker logo is a copyright registered with the Government of Canada. The OFO logo and material published in *OFO News* may not be reproduced without permission.

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40046348
ISSN 1200-1589 © OFO News 2016

Printed by Paragon DPI, Toronto